

DEUS EX: MANKIND
DIVIDED UNVEILED

XBOX ELITE CONTROLLER:
GRAB THE ADVANTAGE

BATMAN: ARKHAM KNIGHT
REVIEWED INSIDE



XBOX

OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE



XBOX OWNS 2015

Halo 5: Guardians leads
Xbox One's killer lineup

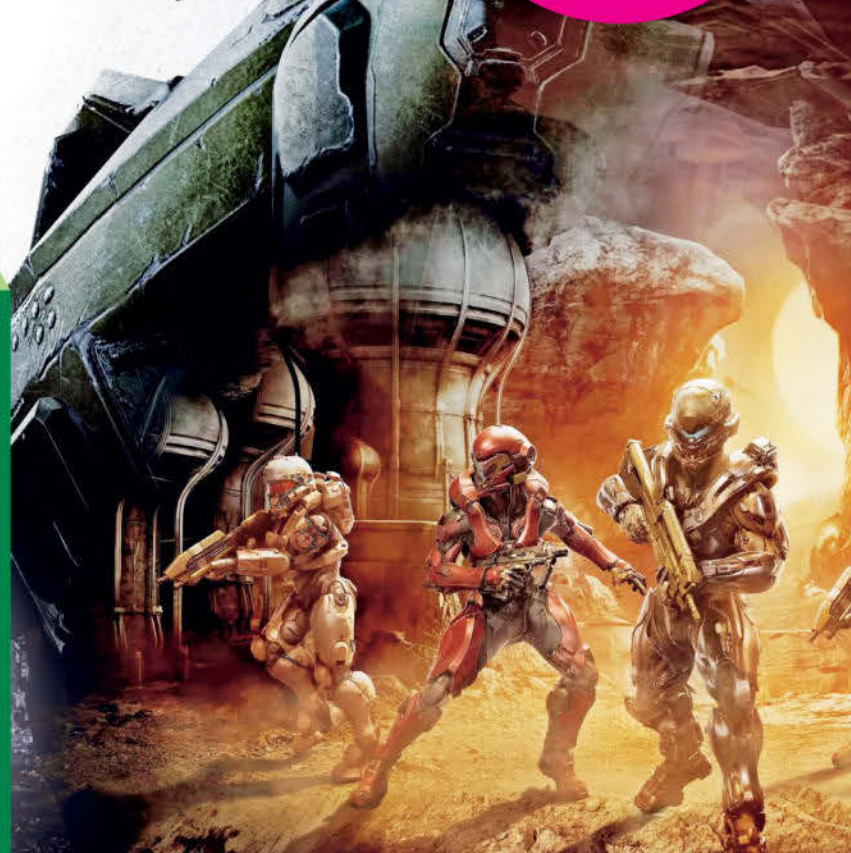
30 PAGES OF NEW INFO

TOMB RAIDER
GEARS OF WAR 4
DARK SOULS 3 MINECRAFT
FORZA 6 HITMAN
THE DIVISION
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Future

Fallout 4

RPG EPIC DROPS
THE BOMB ON
XBOX ONE



RARE REPLAY: 30 CLASSICS RETURN!

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EDITOR'S LETTER

Welcome to the greatest lineup in Xbox history



"MICROSOFT HAS NEVER HAD AN IMMINENT LINEUP AS INCREDIBLE AS THIS"

There are two ways to do an E3 conference: you tantalize and tempt with the treasures you'll one day offer, or you show what gamers can enjoy right now. The latter is rarely as exciting as the former, but then Microsoft has never had an imminent lineup as incredible as this. Come Christmas you'll be enjoying *Halo*, *Forza*, *Tomb Raider*, *Gears of War*, a collection of 30(!) Rare games, not to mention *Fallout 4*, *Metal Gear*, *Battlefront* and more. Oh, and backwards compatibility and early access to some amazing, experimental offerings. Don't know about you, but I'll happily take that lot over the promise of treats in 2017...

Matthew

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Meet the... OXM CONTRIBUTORS



Alex Dale
Deputy editor

Live [ChocoboOfDoom](#)

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[SporadicDaler](#)

We sent Alex to E3 because we know he'll ask the toughest questions. Questions such as: "Where are the toilets?" and "How do I get my parking validated?" We kinda hope he doesn't come back.



Tom Stone
Staff writer

Live OXM Tom Stone

Twitter @
[TheTomStrange](#)

Tom was the clear pick for our *Arkham Knight* review as he shares a similarly tragic backstory to Bruce Wayne. You see, where Bruce lost his parents in an alley, Tom once murdered someone's parents in an alley.



Emma Davies
Production editor

Live OXM Emma

Twitter @[emcetera](#)

You know those automated railway station messages that blurt out security info every ten minutes? Emma basically does that, but with *Game of Thrones* spoilers. If she keeps this up, winter will be the least of her worries.



Joe Skrebels
Community manager

Live OXM Joe

Twitter @[2plus2isjoe](#)

Joe is a community manager, not to be confused with the Community Mangler – the guy responsible for season four of *Community*. Had Joe been in charge of the season, it would have been funnier, if oddly Xbox focused.



ISSUE #178 / September 2015

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BACK ISSUES

To order back issues, please call us at 1-800-865-7240, or visit us on the web at www.totalxbox.com/shop-us.

REPRINTS Please contact us at Future US, Inc., 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080

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ISSN 1534-7850

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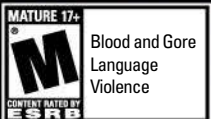
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*Halo: Nightfall: 5 episode live-action series is streaming only, and will initially be available on a weekly basis, and then on demand. Xbox One or Windows 8.1 and broadband internet required; ISP fees apply. Halo 5: Guardians Beta: Game disc required. Limited-time beta starts December 27, 2014, and ends January 22, 2015. Must be 17+. Xbox One, broadband internet (ISP fees apply) and Xbox LIVE Gold membership (sold separately) required. Halo: Nightfall and Halo 5: Guardians Beta dates, content, and features subject to change. See www.xbox.com/halo



XBOX ONE

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XBOX FIGHTS BACK

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DEUS EX: MANKIND DIVIDED

Wrist chisels: engage.



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BATMAN: ARKHAM KNIGHT

Cape out of ten?



OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE (ISSN 1534-7850) is published 13 times a year, monthly plus Holiday issue following December issue by Future US, Inc., 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Phone: (650) 872-1642, Fax: (650) 872-2207. Website: www.futureus.com. Periodicals postage paid in San Bruno, CA and at additional mailing offices. Newsstand distribution is handled by Time Warner Retail. Basic subscription rates: one year (12 issues) US: \$24.95; Canada: US\$29.95. Canadian orders must be prepaid. Canadian price includes postage and GST #R128220688, PMA #40612608. Subscriptions do not include newsstand specials. POSTMASTER: Send changes of address to Official Xbox Magazine, PO Box 5852, Harlan, IA 51593-1352. Standard Mail enclosed in the following edition: None. Ride-Along enclosed in the following editions: None. Returns: IMEX Global Solutions, PO Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2, Canada. Future US, Inc. also publishes @Gamer, Crochet Today!, MacLife, Maximum PC, and PC Gamer. Entire contents copyright 2014, Future US, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited. Future US, Inc. is not affiliated with the companies or products covered in Official Xbox Magazine. Reproduction on the Internet of the articles and pictures in this magazine is illegal without the prior written consent of Official Xbox Magazine. Products named in the pages of Official Xbox Magazine are trademarks of their respective companies. PRODUCED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.



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INSIDER

XBOX NEWS, ANALYSIS, CULTURE, OPINION & MORE

New COGs, new foes —
the wait begins for
the next *Gears*.

THE FIGHTBACK BEGINS

BOXING CLEVER

In a rousing E3 conference Microsoft offered plenty of reasons, from past and future, to believe Xbox One's time is now



EA Access gets robots and dragons

Titanfall stomps into EA's vault of downloadable Xbox One games (for all eight of you who don't already own it) and will be joined by *Dragon Age: Inquisition* later this summer. That's \$4.99 a month for 13 whole games and zero free time.



Buy Siege and visit Vegas

Prefer your *Rainbow Six* action with more story and fewer hammers? You're in luck: buying *Siege* on Xbox One will net you free copies of *Rainbow Six Vegas 1* and *2*, courtesy of Xbox One's newly added Xbox 360 backwards compatibility.

//IT'S A CONFIDENT RETURN TO WHAT
TOOK XBOX 360 TO THE TOP IN THE
FIRST PLACE: CARS AND GUNS//



Halo, *Gears*, *Forza* – oh, and every game you've ever bought for your Xbox 360.

Heading into the Galen Center, a basketball arena in downtown Los Angeles that traditionally plays host to Microsoft's E3 press conferences, the mission statement was loud, clear, and hanging from the rafters: "See the greatest lineup in Xbox history." Nothing like setting expectations low, is there?

But then, Microsoft was hardly in a position to be bashful. Let's be honest: the Xbox One has endured a rocky start in life. Arguably it struggled to recover from the lashing it received at the hands of Sony at E3 2013, where it took aim at the Xbox One's (now abandoned) pre-owned policy that would have prevented you from trading in your old games.

Despite a steady upturn, Xbox One has been playing catch-up with PlayStation 4 ever since. With 2015 seeing the Xbox 360 release schedule finally dry up after ten phenomenally successful years, this conference marked a golden chance for Microsoft to convince a generation of loyal fans that now is the time to upgrade. And straight from the off, it was clear Microsoft wasn't pulling its punches. As the announcement rang through the arena that the Xbox One would soon be able to play your Xbox 360 games collection (see page 39 for more), Xbox head of platform engineering Mike Ybarra delivered a zinger two years in the making: "We won't charge you to play the games you already own." A clear swipe at the PlayStation 4's troubled streaming service, Now.

As expected, Microsoft dug deep into its archives and produced a software lineup that was, for the most part, safe and steady, and clearly geared towards reminding lapsed fans why they fell in love with their Xboxes in the first place.

Halo opened the show and *Gears of War* closed it, and peppered between were constant reminders that Microsoft had rediscovered its A(AA) game; titles such as *Forza 6* and *Rise of the Tomb Raider* were almost refreshing in their familiarity. After years in the wilderness tinkering with *Avatars* and motion-sensing dance titles, this E3 was something of a homecoming. A return to what took the





Build your own F-Zero on Xbox

Ubisoft's impossible road simulator *Trackmania Turbo* heads to Xbox One in November. If you can dream it, you can build it. Out of distinctly un-dreamlike asphalt.



» Xbox 360 to the top of the mountain in the first place: cars and guns.

But simmering underneath these white-hot big-budget behemoths was a raft of low-key but high-impact announcements that proved Microsoft isn't content simply to trade on its past glories. And these announcements all had one thing in common. At the Game Developers Conference earlier this year, Microsoft planted the seeds of a future in which devs would be able to make content either for Xbox One or Windows 10 PCs, and then port it to the other effortlessly. That's not exactly a sexy sell at face value, but it opens up a world of potential benefits to Xbox One owners. At this year's E3 conference, we got a first taste of some of the fruits of the arrangement. (Sorry for all the plant metaphors, by the way. We think the *Plants vs Zombies* trailer broke us.)

As fruits go, they come none more peachier than Xbox Game Preview, an early access program that launched with *Elite: Dangerous* and *The Long Dark* (and is covered on page 22). Almost as big is Bethesda's announcement that *Fallout 4* mods created for the PC version of the game can be exported to the Xbox One

You'll be able to explore 26 locales in *Forza 6*'s collection of more than 450 cars.

version. If you've only played console versions of Bethesda's RPG epics, you could be forgiven for not appreciating why this is such a big deal. On PC, mods are the lifeblood of the *Elder Scrolls* and *Fallout* series, offering homemade gameplay tweaks that remix the action and give the games near-infinite replayability.

In *Fallout 3* (which is packaged in with the Xbox One version of *Fallout 4*, by the way) for example, mods range from cosmetic alterations to make the world sunnier, to expansive labours of love such as the DC Interiors Project, which has turned all of the game's

inaccessible interiors into carefully-crafted, explorable areas crammed full of loot. Thanks to the Windows/Xbox One link-up, we too will be able to benefit from the *Fallout 4* community's creativity when the game hits consoles on 10 November. The only question is, will it be a copyright-less free-for-all like it is on PC, or will Microsoft act as curator, filtering only approved mods?

There's no point asking us, as Galen Center janitors are still scrubbing our brains off the ceiling after our minds were blown by a demo of a HoloLens-enabled version of *Minecraft*, which allows players to conjure up



Coming on 10 November, *Rise of the Tomb Raider* has CG film quality characters and effects.



Custom pads celebrate Ford history

Forza's Ford partnership extends beyond dropping cars on E3 guests: Turn 10 built three pads based on Ford's Le Mans victories. Not for sale, sadly.



a hologram of their world onto a flat surface and interact with it via voice and hand gestures.

But while it's still unclear how, or even if, the HoloLens will coexist with our Xbox Ones, virtual reality is assuredly in the console's near future, thanks to an astute partnership with the PC's Oculus Rift headset. When the long-awaited consumer version of the virtual reality headset finally hits stores sometime in early 2016, it'll do so alongside a standard Xbox One pad, and you'll be able to beam games you're playing on Xbox One straight to your eyeballs via the headset (and a PC running Windows 10, of course).

That's not as incredible as it sounds, however; Xbox One games aren't designed with virtual reality in mind, so they won't have the same immersion as a custom-designed Rift title. But with the two technologies sharing both a controller and architecture in

common, it doesn't take a lot of effort to imagine a future where Xbox One titles roll off the production line Rift-ready. It's an opportunity that simply wouldn't have been possible without the Windows/Xbox love-in.

Microsoft is doubling-down on the alliance as it preps the console for a brighter future, to the extent that we're even getting a new Dashboard this autumn, bringing the interface closer in line with that of Windows 10, and even adding in Windows' voice-activated UI assistant, Cortana.

A bold, innovative and slightly scary future beckons for Xbox One owners, both existing and freshly converted, in the years to come, then. We say embrace it. But for now, you can find comfort in the knowledge that this winter, you'll be able to bask in the warm, familiar glow of *Halo*, *Gears*, *Forza* and much more besides.

Alex Dale

//A BOLD, INNOVATIVE AND SLIGHTLY SCARY FUTURE BECKONS FOR XBOX ONE OWNERS, BOTH EXISTING AND FRESHLY CONVERTED, IN THE YEARS TO COME//

THIS MONTH WE LEARNED...

p14



How to build a brave new world in post-apocalyptic Boston.

p17



More about made-up history than we ever did about actual history.

p18



Who is better at building overpaid sports stars out of polygons.

p20



Why *Battlefield Hardline's* dev is all about that beta.

p22



Why early access is a godsend for gamers *and* developers.

Microsoft

LEAVE YOUR LIMITS





FORZA **HORIZON 2**

Open it up in a truly massive open-world. From day to night, dirt to pavement. Connect and race with friends in the most realistic—and unreal—driving game out there with more than 200 of the world's greatest cars. Get the demo now on Xbox One.

Features and requirements subject to change. Features vary between Xbox 360 and Xbox One version of game (each sold separately). Xbox One games for use only with Xbox One systems. Games made for Xbox 360 will not work on Xbox One. Xbox LIVE Gold membership (sold separately) required for online multiplayer; multiplayer between Xbox 360 and Xbox One not supported. On Xbox 360, some cars require download from Xbox LIVE (ISP fees apply) and a hard drive. For Xbox 360 4GB, Arcade and Core consoles (hard drive sold separately). Demo available for Xbox One only. Download from Xbox LIVE. 12GB required. ISP fees apply.



DASHBOARD

PUTTING THE RAD IN RADICAL

FINALLY! FALLOUT 4 FEATURES!

Or How Fallout 4 learned to stop worrying and love the Xbox One



MR AND MRS 111

You play as one half of a married couple, piecing his or her face together as they goof about in front of a mirror. You also pick a name – over 1,000 monikers were recorded so your posh robot butler, Codsworth, can address you directly.

What's the story?

Quick, act surprised! After years of speculation and incriminating LinkedIn profiles, Bethesda revealed the fourth numbered entry in the unrivaled post-apocalyptic open-world series. After a prologue that sees you escaping the bomb that falls on your idyllic Boston suburb, our hero (or heroine) emerges from a vault. Good news: your reliable robot butler has kept your dinner warm. Bad news: he's been doing so for 200 years. Quite a nap.

Why should I care?

In development since 2009, this is the biggest world Bethesda's built to date. Its prettiest, too: this is the next-generation version of its creaking Creation Engine, full of volumetric lighting and – even better – the end of freaky waxwork avatars. Oh, and there's a hugely ambitious crafting system: every item can be broken down into materials to upgrade guns or build your very own settlement, brick by brick. You'll even have to wire up the generators. Yikes.

What happens next?

Here's the really cool bit: *Fallout 4* is practically finished, and will arrive on 10 November. On that day, you have to make a difficult decision: do you buy the regular game or cough up \$120 for the *Pip-Boy Edition* and its lifesize replica of the wrist-mounted information processor? Brilliantly, a smartphone can be inserted and used as the screen – thanks to a companion app coming to iOS and Android. It'll let you manage your in-game stats and live the dream.



LOOK WHO'S GROWN A MOUTH

Radiation has seen our vault-dweller's vocal cords mutate: they actually work! Chatting uses a *Mass Effect*-like dialog wheel, can be watched in third person and allows you to walk away – or shoot – to cut talk short.





Xbox One gets a (dis)honorable discharge

Arkane makes the agonising wait for *Dishonored 2* easier with *Dishonored: Definitive Edition* for Xbox One. It'll be shinier, include all the DLC and arrive in a blink of an eye (August).



SETTLERS OF BOSTON

There will be several large sites where you can build settlements. Not only will new merchants move in, but you can set up Brahmin caravans between them for trade purposes. Of course, more settlers means more potential raider victims...

BOSTON DREAD-SOX

Ghouls are back, one missed shot causing them to sprint at you. Returning Deathclaws are called that for a reason, ripping heroes apart in a second. Even Molerats seem supercharged, bursting from the soil to nip at your ankles.



BOSTON TERRIER

Fallout 3's Dogmeat was our highlight of the game (no offense, Liam Neeson), but our new mutt is smarter: he responds to context-sensitive commands to attack, retrieve items or simply move. That's it, boy; you go explore that minefield.

UPPERS & DOWNERS

This month's temperature, taken
WHAT'S HOT?

1



FALLOUT 4

A game so hot that if you put it next to a nuclear blast the mushroom cloud would be all like, "That's a bit much."

2



HALO 5: GUARDIANS

We doubted there'd ever be a better companion than Cortana. Then along comes Nathan Fillion. Yeah, that'll do it.

3



BACKWARDS COMPATIBILITY

Okay, we'll have to wait and see what makes the leap from Xbox 360, but not having to swap TV cables is a godsend.

4



DARK SOULS III

Not just new *Souls*, but a new *Souls* directed by Miyazaki. Sorry *DSII*, this is the true sequel we've been waiting for.

5



GHOST RECON: WILDLANDS

Several games gave us stealth and skydiving, but only Ubi's Clancy revival had the magic third ingredient: alpacas.

WHAT'S NOT?

1



ABSOLUTELY NOTHING

E3 was fantastic! If you can't be happy with that lot, it might be time to find a different hobby. A truly epic year.

“IN VIDEOGAMES, MURDERING PEOPLE IS HARD – SO WHY IS TALKING MY WAY OUT OF A FIGHT SO EASY?”

Tom wishes he could barely string two sentences together when talking to his enemies. Just like in real life



Switch on the wonderful *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* and I'm no longer a humble games journalist in desperate need of a haircut. I'm Geralt of Rivia, a hardcore monster-hunting heartthrob in desperate need of a haircut. I have muscles in places you don't even know you have. I've slaughtered nine bandits in the time it took you to finish this sentence. I shot a griffin out of the sky as part of the *tutorial*. Now I'm about to kill a demon who's been exploiting the local villagers, like the incredible warrior I am. CHAAAAAARGE!

Or, you can choose a threatening piece of dialogue and see if he backs down. Well, okay, but I didn't really do any- QUEST COMPLETE! 25 EXPERIENCE GAINED! NO FIGHT NECESSARY. Uh, yay? *Wild Hunt's* combat makes me feel like a monster-murdering badass, something I'm arguably not. But its conversations just make me feel like I'm playing a dull turn-based text adventure, one I've endured in many games before. One where it's usually pretty obvious what line is going to defuse the situation ('I am so, so sorry; let's hug it out') and which will make things worse ('I haven't been this happy since your mother's funeral. I'm glad I killed her'). Villains usually wait patiently for you to speak up, too: even Charles Dance's Emperor gave us all the time in the world to respond to his questions.

Combat's always getting improved and altered in games, but we need more innovation in how we communicate. Telltale's



use of a countdown bar is effective, something *The Witcher 3* occasionally tries. But what if that countdown bar was there and we just couldn't see it? What if we had to guess how much time we had to respond, based on the triviality of the question and the power of who was asking it?

Say a villager asked Geralt what his favorite dance move is. We could get away with a good 20 minutes of mulling that over, or just push the villager down and get on with our looting. But if the Emperor demanded we tell him our favourite color, we'd probably have milliseconds to spit it out before he had us executed. Because we'd never

know how long the time limit is, or if there even is a time limit, each encounter would demand our full attention.

Actually, why stop at *our* dialogue? Games could make us slowly move the analog stick



"What if we replaced all the dialogue with fist bumps?" - marketing executive, about to get fired.

up and down to nod, gasp and frown along to NPCs' lines and give the impression we're listening – hold down the triggers to hold in a conversation-killing yawn. On that note, we could even get Kinect involved to read facial expressions, with Geralt receiving a slap if you show the slightest trace of boredom.

I'm humble enough to admit that perhaps not all of my ideas are 100% perfect. But the current standard of game dialogue, selecting lines of text to trigger the next part of the cutscene, has been tolerated for decades. It's only going to feel more dated as our games get more advanced. Improving the way we talk in videogames is a conversation that we need to have, even if that using-the-triggers-for-yawn-avoidance idea probably means I've lost my invitation. Me and my big mouth.

NEXT MONTH An NPC spokesman gives us their rebuttal. They don't like talking to Tom, either.

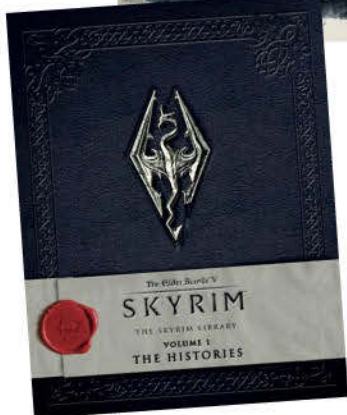
// WILD HUNT'S COMBAT MAKES ME FEEL LIKE A MONSTER-SLAUGHTERING BADASS, SOMETHING I'M ARGUABLY NOT //



More Walking Dead shambles out

Telltale kills time before *Season Three* with *The Walking Dead: Michonne*, a three part mini-series about the titular comics character.

DASHBOARD



I FOUGHT THE LORE AND THE LORE WON

The first in a series of official lore books collects the histories of Skyrim

Do you love both reading and videogames? Then you'll love *Official Xbox Magazine*... Oh. Sorry. Force of habit there. Fans of *Skyrim* know that some of the books found in the game are humongous tomes – full of interesting backstory, but hardly ideal for squinting at on our TV

screen. Well squint no more! As Titan Books is releasing the lore in several hardbacks, including illustrations and artwork. Intrigued, we broke into Titan's dungeons and heroically looted ourselves a copy, then got caught red handed and chained up in a cell. While we await execution, Titan kindly allowed us a last read...

//GRIM, BUT THE HISTORY OF SKYRIM WASN'T ALL SUNSHINE AND LOLLIPOPS//

THE ARGONIAN ACCOUNT

An epic tale of thievery, illusionists and, er, trade negotiations. Wait, come back! *The Argonian Account* follows Decumus Scotti, who journeys through Skyrim during the Five Year War, trying to fix a crime-ridden trading route and avoid death by drowning, being eaten alive and the dreaded paperwork. Through incompetence, luck and greed, he eventually retires rich from embezzled funds. Inspiring!

OLAF AND THE DRAGON

Keep an eyebrow raised during this one, as renowned warrior Olaf One-Eye volunteers to slaughter deadly dragon Numinex. The author makes a point of reminding us that this tale of a man who possesses dragon shouts, but decided to try attacking the dragon with swords anyway, *could be nonsense. Right.*

THE WINDHELM LETTERS

We love going through other people's mail here at *OXM*, but these were almost sad enough to make us quit our favourite illegal pastime. It follows the tragic correspondence of Reyliya, living under the reign of an insane king in a doomed city, as her family start to starve. Grim, but the history of Skyrim wasn't all sunshine and lollipops. They didn't even know what lollipops were. Tragic.

THE LUSTY ARGONIAN MAID

Uh, can we really recommend this one in a family magazine? It's an extract from Crassius Curio's play, and full of innuendo. How the hell did this smut get inside a *history book*? We were so appalled, we ripped this page out and stuffed it into our pockets. Just so that we could destroy it properly later, of course.

YOU'RE FIRED! > QUOTES OF THE MONTH > BLAH BLAH > HE SAID WHAT? > YADDA

"Usually I find second-screen experiences are just stupid gimmicks. But as far as stupid gimmicks go, this is the best fucking one I've ever seen."

Fallout 4 director Todd Howard reveals the real-life Pip-Boy and its companion app.

"Let's take that experience off the wall and put it on the table over here. Create world!"

The moment Microsoft Studio's Sax Persson conjured a *Minecraft* world out of a table using HoloLens, blowing all our minds.

"I see a pigpen over here. I think the pigs need an upgrade. Lightning strike! There you have it: a zombie pig-man."

Sax Persson's *Minecraft* demo doesn't quite end on the same high as it began.

DASHBOARD

CAN I KICK IT?

SOCCER SHOWDOWN

FIFA 16 and PES 2016 both want to steal your season – which one wants it most?

The past was a simpler time, a time in which either *FIFA* or *PES* was clear top dog. You knew where you stood. But now there's so little between these lone sporting titans, the Real Madrid and Barcelona of a crowded genre that once featured the incredible likes of *Chris Kamara's Street Soccer*, that it's down to intrepid features in genius magazines such as this to steer you in the right direction.

There's *FIFA 16*, with its 20 accurately modeled stadiums and YouTube-conquering Ultimate Team; there's *PES 2016*, with its Champions

League license and supermodel looks courtesy of the Fox Engine. They're both brilliant skews on what Pelé insists on calling 'the Beautiful Game' to everyone's continued annoyance, and yet tricky to define, a bit like the word 'complacent'. Describing how they play often leaves you using odd terms like 'stodgy' and 'boggy'. So to prevent that, we've separated the fight into five categories. To make the whole thing immediately redundant, however, let's just say this: whichever one you scout will be worthy of your transfer funds.



Will it be *FIFA 16*, with its ten-man celebrations, improved defending and women's teams...

1 THIS YEAR'S BIG FEATURE?



VS



That'll be the ladies, then. In a milestone for the male-dominated sport, a soccer game will, for the first time, feature women's teams. 12 top international squads make it in, all mo-capped, and you can use them in Match Days, Offline Tournaments, and Online Friendlies.

Konami has plenty planned for PES's 20th anniversary. The biggest of which is the Collision System, which ditches locking-up jostles and results in more organic, fluid physicality. There's also Human Motion which triples the amount of animations and leads to richer movement.

2 HOW SHINY IS IT?

There are a few noticeable improvements this time around, including new lighting models for foggy, snowy, sunny, dusky and overcast conditions, and a fresh layer of detail on player faces to make them look less like waxwork models of millionaire idiots.

Fresh nighttime textures and pitch degradation – further affected by dynamic weather – give environments a spruce. Thanks to the stunning Fox Engine, turf flies and water droplets kick up. Player faces, meanwhile, remain the benchmark for sports games.

3 WHAT'S ATTACKING LIKE?

Passes with Purpose gives attacks new impetus. These are quicker-than-normal charge-up passes and more effective at exploiting tight gaps. On the shooting side, volleys are more venomous, and No-Touch Dribbling lets you perform RB body feints independent of the ball.

You've more control in one-on-ones, where the aim is to use sudden directional changes to outmaneuver defenders. Player ID comes into play here, with bigger names moving like you'd expect. Intelligent AI means teammates are better at finding space and making runs.

WINNER:
FIFA 16

WINNER:
PES 2016

WINNER:
FIFA 16



Castle Crashers smashes onto Xbox One

Castle Crashers Remastered has a 60fps framerate, improved multiplayer and a new 'Back off Barbarian' mini-game. The original was great, so we're keen for the jump to Xbox One.

//THEY'RE BOTH
BRILLIANT SKEWS ON
WHAT PELÉ INSISTS
ON CALLING 'THE
BEAUTIFUL GAME'//



...or PES 2016
with the stunning
Fox Engine,
intelligent AI and
aerial battles?

4 HOW ABOUT DEFENDING?

Defenders combat those power passes with a new urgency that sees them race to intercept passes and challenge (fairly) from behind, and a new swing step animation allows them to transition from a backpedal to keep up with wingers. They'll also plug gaps.

Aerial Battles breathe life into mid-air contests. Performing a well-timed tackle, meanwhile, shoves off opponents and gives you instant possession to launch a quick counter. Finally, goalies have more personality, with some catching balls and others punching them.

WINNER:
FIFA 16

5 AND THE LITTLE TOUCHES?

Referees now carry vanishing foam, players' heads fully track balls, and there are fresh skill moves – including some Yannick Bolasie magic. Also: ten-man celebrations. We saw Agüero being beset upon by Man City's entire squad and flung into the air like a piece of garbage.

You now have greater control over celebrations, matching button prompts to trigger trademark actions or performing original ones (one sees the scorer take a selfie). There's also a dynamic wide camera angle that tilts and pans, and a new commentator in Peter Drury.

WINNER:
FIFA 16



Rumor & Speculation

The five biggest bits of gossip this month

1 *Gears of War* remake replaces all Locust enemies with internet leakers.

EXCITEMENT: 3/10
LIKELIHOOD: 8/10

2 *Shenmue 3* inspires Microsoft to announce its own Kickstarter of a beloved Sega series: *Ecco the Dolphin Kinect*.

EXCITEMENT: 1/10
LIKELIHOOD: 3/10

3 *Final Fantasy VII* remake to be finished/released within our lifetimes.

EXCITEMENT: 9/10
LIKELIHOOD: 2/10

4 *Guitar Hero Live* ships with real crowd of unimpressed drunks.

EXCITEMENT: 2/10
LIKELIHOOD: 5/10

5 *The Arkham Knight* is Adam West.

EXCITEMENT: 10/10
LIKELIHOOD: 6/10

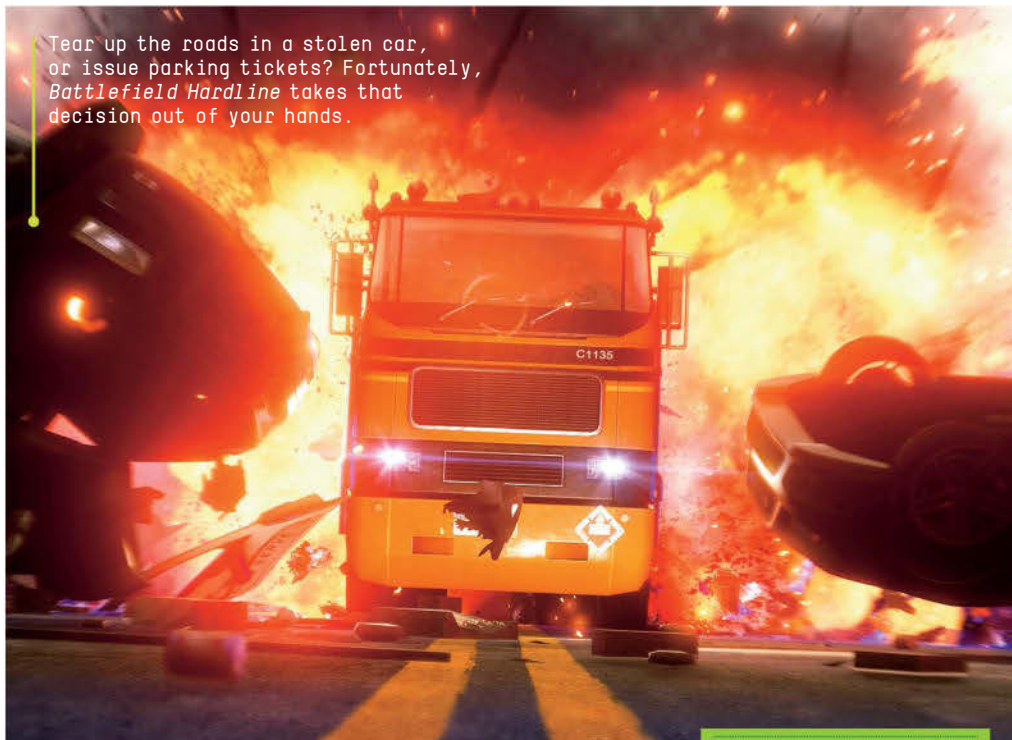
TEN PRO TIPS

THIS MONTH:

HOW TO DESIGN A BALANCED MULTIPLAYER SHOOTER

Battlefield Hardline's Thad Sasser on the delicate tinkering that power today's robust online shooters

Tear up the roads in a stolen car, or issue parking tickets? Fortunately, *Battlefield Hardline* takes that decision out of your hands.



1 Have a vision

We have a high-level goal for each mode – for Hotwire, for instance, our vision was ‘high-speed pursuit’. Every time we made changes we went back to see if it was pushing us in the direction we wanted the mode to go in.

2 Pick a form

Traditional, symmetrical modes are preferable – it’s much easier for the players to get their head around the rules, as everyone’s doing the same thing. But sometimes asymmetrical gameplay can capture a theme more faithfully. When I think about cops and robbers, I think of *Heat* and *Die Hard*, and asymmetrical modes can deliver that fantasy so much better.

3 Crowdsource ideas

One of the best things about working at EA is ideas can

come from anywhere. If you break down what Hotwire actually is, it’s Conquest with moving capture points. That idea came from a collaborative design meeting where we invited everyone to contribute.

4 Break the rules

We went through ten iterations of Hotwire. We were convinced at first asymmetrical was the way to go – because why would a cop want to steal a car? But actually the symmetrical version worked a lot better, because everyone wanted to steal cars and drive around. We decided it made most sense to rewrite the fantasy; now the police are ‘repossessing’ the cars.

5 Feedback is crucial

We originally had a mechanic in Heist where

BACKGROUND CHECK

NAME Thad Sasser

JOB TITLE Lead multiplayer designer, Visceral Games

BIO Sasser cut his teeth at Treyarch in the mid-’00s, working as a designer on multiplayer titles such as *Call of Duty 2: Big Red One* and *Call of Duty 3*. From there, he accepted a position at Ubisoft Red Storm, where he worked as lead designer on *Tom Clancy’s Ghost Recon: Future Soldier* and won the company’s ‘Designer of the Year’ award in 2010. His first *Battlefield* project was the 2013 *BF3* expansion pack *End Game*.

you’d slow down once you picked up the bag – we wanted to give your teammates a chance to catch up with you, and the idea was that you’d feel really cool. But in playtesting, players hated it – they found it frustrating and were actively avoiding the bag.

6 Plan maps carefully

Our maps have to be fun both on foot and in a vehicle. That’s challenging, but working with DICE on *BF3* taught us a lot about how maps should be paced out. So we build what we call infantry honeypots – a cluster of capture points that are easily within the reach of on-foot soldiers. They’re surrounded by more sparse areas for vehicles.

7 Create strategic openings

At the edge of these honeypots, there’s opportunity for tactical warfare. Infantry can use these as ambush points, but if the defending team aren’t properly organized, you can just storm in with a tank.

8 Don’t force design...

Hotwire works best in maps with long, straight roads, and large, expansive areas. Because of that, it can’t support all of the maps. We’re not going to try to force a mode to play nice with a map that doesn’t work.

9 ...or the player

We thought, ‘Why don’t we let players get to choose what they want to play with first? Wouldn’t that encourage them to explore?’. That’s the origin of our flexible progression system.

10 Beta is best

Public betas give us all the data we could want to make sure we’ve got the weapon balancing right. It’s a chance to see how our creations work in real-world situations. **OXM**



Wild Run DLC revamps The Crew

Managed to exhaust (ho ho) a whole virtual America? Adding motorbikes, monster trucks and a whole graphical upgrade should help...

DASHBOARD



This wireless adapter will enable your Xbox One controller to play nice with Windows 10 PCs.



The Covert Forces controller is available now. The revamped black pad goes on sale later this summer.



DRIVES DOUBLED AND PRICES SLASHED

Xbox One gets TB (but not the bad kind) and a controller upgrade

Before the E3 flood came a trickle of good news, as Microsoft revealed a new model of the Xbox One, and with it, plenty of reasons to get excited. The Xbox One 1TB features a whole terabyte of on-board storage in which to keep your *Zoo Tycoon* video clips and fitness apps you swear you'll get around to using one day. In the unlikely case that's not enough, you can still consider adding more with a USB 3.0-powered external drive.

To put that in perspective, the current Xbox One contains 500GB, so this doubles its storage. And as hard drives get figuratively bigger, to paraphrase Moore's law, prices get

literally smaller. That's why Microsoft has made the 500GB model's price drop to \$349 a permanent one. If you haven't bought an Xbox One yet, there's never been a better time to join the 15 million players already on board.

But there's more to the 1TB model than memory. For \$399 you'll also get the revamped wireless Xbox One controller that fine-tunes the bumpers to give more consistent feedback across the entire surface area, and enables wireless firmware updates.

There's also a 3.5mm stereo headset jack on the bottom designed to accommodate most gaming headsets. To appease the audio gods,

Microsoft has not only improved the quality and volume of the sounds that pipe through the controller, but also added options to adjust headset volume, mic monitoring, and audio balance. You can enjoy all these features on the

Special Edition Covert Forces pad, on sale now. Not sure what the camouflaged look is about, mind – infiltrating the PS4 shelves, perhaps?

//THE PRICE OF
A 500GB XBOX
ONE HAS BEEN
SLASHED TO \$349//

IN NUMBERS > DATAPOINT: NEWS IN NUMBERS > DATAPOINT: NEWS IN NUMBERS

15

The number of multiplayer maps that will be added as free DLC to *Halo 5: Guardians* after launch. Not too shabby.

12

The number of women's teams in *FIFA 16* – 12 more than the game's ever had.

100

Number of playable characters in *Disney Infinity 3.0*. The best of which is obviously Yoda.

TRIED AND TESTED

THE EARLY BIRD CATCHES THE GAME

A new early access programme has arrived on Xbox One, giving you the chance to get directly involved in the development of a game

Digital distribution platform Steam has been running Early Access on PC for a few years now. It gives you the chance to buy early versions of in-development games, often at a reduced cost. A similar program has come to Xbox One, called Xbox Game Preview, and is already offering two brilliant games: *The Long Dark* and *Elite: Dangerous*.

"Xbox Game Preview allows players the opportunity to download and evaluate a selection of games under active development," says Microsoft's Larry Hryb. "Every game in the programme has a free trial, allowing the community to get involved and provide feedback during the development process."

On Steam, Early Access has been a huge success. It gives players the chance to steer the

development of games by talking directly to developers and giving them feedback. It's also an intriguing insight into the process of game development, watching a game grow and evolve over time. But it's not without its problems. The free-for-all, unfiltered nature of the PC platform means Steam's Early Access program has been flooded with hundreds of near-identical, half-finished zombie survival games. But hopefully

//IT'S AN INTRIGUING INSIGHT INTO THE PROCESS OF GAME DEVELOPMENT, WATCHING A GAME GROW AND EVOLVE OVER TIME//

Microsoft will be stricter with Xbox Game Preview.

Usually devs have in-house QA teams who play unfinished games and report back with suggestions and bug reports. But now that job is being handed over to anyone with an Xbox One, which is bigger and more honest than any testing team.

Because they're still in development, you'll have to put up with Xbox Game Preview titles being buggy, crashy, and missing content. But take part and you'll get to be involved in a game's development, help the creators make it great with a bit of extra money, and play games long before release. You can try *Elite* and *The Long Dark* now (with free demos of both), and more games are on the way.



Battle of the bands dated

Guitar Hero Live will be out 20 October for Xbox One and Xbox 360. That's two weeks after *Rock Band 4* on 6 October, but that's coming to Xbox One only. Fight!

HOW TO SPEAK DEVELOPER

Your guide to translating those interview gems

"It's such an honor to be on the E3 main stage, talking about my new game!"

If I could see what Twitter was saying about me right now, I wouldn't stop weeping for a year.

"We wanted to make something that was as fun to watch as it is to play."

We got that balance: it's no fun at all.

"That was a major criticism of our last title that we're keen to address. Thanks for bringing it up."

I'm going to develop my next game with a big publisher, just so I have the power to have you killed.

"We're not showing a trailer at E3 this year, as we want to keep what we're working on under wraps for now."

They refused to show a ten-minute clip of us emptying the publisher's money into a flaming barrel.



ELITE: DANGEROUS

This dizzyingly huge space sandbox features a to-scale recreation of the Milky Way, and sets you loose in it with a basic ship and 1,000 credits. What you do next is up to you. You could become a pirate, stealing other cargo. Or how about a trader, ferrying goods for profit? There are endless ways to play, and it's insanely pretty, with cosmic vistas that'll make you stare in awe.



SHELTERED

This mix of *The Sims* and *Fallout* puts you in a bomb shelter after a nuclear holocaust. In this bleak new world, survival and safety are everything. You'll have to keep tabs on fuel, rations, medicine and entertainment and brave the outside world if you want any of them to survive. It's hostile above, so expect to fight other wastelanders, and even a bear. No one said survival was easy.



THE LONG DARK

Set in a rugged Canadian wilderness after a mysterious apocalyptic event, *The Long Dark* is all about survival. If wolves don't get you, hunger, thirst or cold will. You have to scavenge for supplies, find shelter, keep a fire going, and defend yourself from animal attacks. The hand-painted visual style is gorgeous, and the survival simulation is mercilessly brutal. How many days will you last?



DAYZ

This online zombie survival game places you in a wasteland filled with undead and swindled by other players – and it's frequently the latter that cause problems. It's every man for himself, and you'll be kidnapped and swindled by other survivors who want to get their hands on your precious tinned beans. You start in a T-shirt with no supplies, but find a backpack, food and a gun, and you can start climbing the food chain.

DASHBOARD

UPDATES - NEW INFO ON THE BIG GAMES

PUBLISHER WARNER BROS INTERACTIVE / DEVELOPER AVALANCHE STUDIOS / FORMAT XBOX ONE / ETA 4 SEP

MAD MAX

The *other* post-apocalyptic sandbox is shaping up to be a blasterpiece

So we're playing as Tom Hardy? How about some Bane voice DLC?

Sadly not. *Mad Max's* hectic roadtrip on Xbox One is inspired by the films, rather than being directly based on any of them. Our Max is a far more generic-looking hero, with a thick Australian voice that's at least more consistent than the wheel of accents Tom Hardy kept slipping into over the course of *Fury Road*. It's a new story too, where Max battles the armies of Gastown led by the charming-sounding Lord Scrotus.

So how does it play? Are we going to be carefully choosing dialogue to negotiate peace?

Hardly. This isn't *Telltale Presents: Mad Max*. Combat is bloody and brutal, similar in style to Rocksteady's *Arkham* series. Unlike Batman, however, Max has no beef with killing people, so fighting is a lot more savage here. Fun as it looks, the real draw of the game will be the brutality of the driving, which looks to be as chaotic and explosion-happy as you'd expect from the developer of *Just Cause*.

Do we play as Charlize Theron? How about some *Arrested Development* DLC?

Absolutely not. Mechanic Chumbucket, rather than Theron's formidable Imperator Furiosa, is Max's companion this time. He'll helpfully shout out which part of your car is taking serious damage whenever you ram a rival driver off the road or introduce your ride to the side of a cliff. Handy – and if you take the risk of pulling to a stop he'll crawl over the car, fixing damage while you keep an eye out for threats.

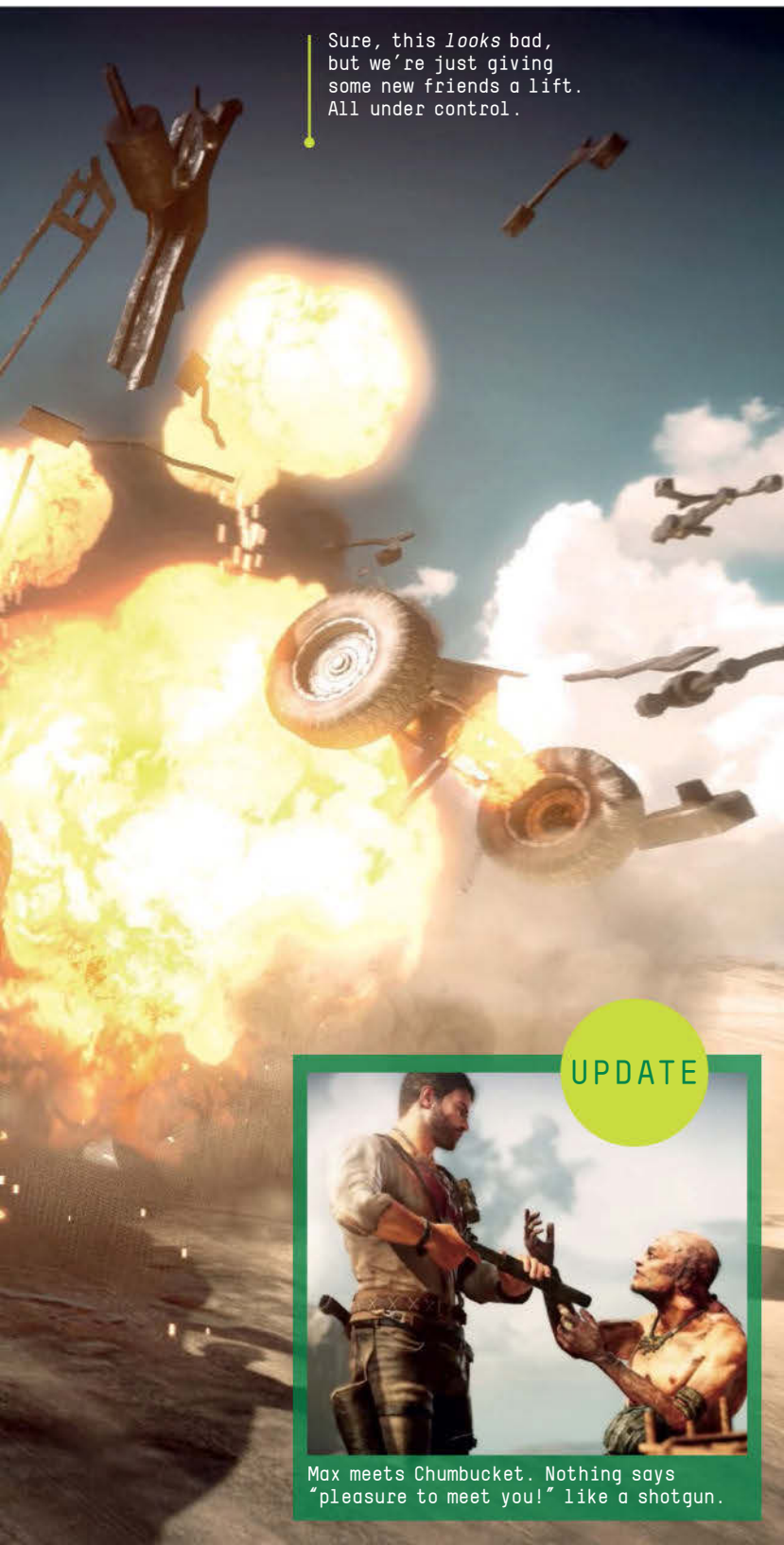
STOP?! Why would I stop? They call me Mr Unstoppable, you know.

Because stopping lets you use the vehicle's attached sniper rifle. If you'd rather keep moving, you can fire harpoons to take out cars' tyres or drivers. There's a flamethrower, too, which burns anything dumb enough to get too close, but drains your precious fuel in the process. A risky move.

Why not live in the all-powerful car? We've been doing that since the divorce anyway.

Sorry to hear that, but it's not an option. When fuel runs out, Max has to get more out of the boot and slowly refuel manually. Doing this leaves you completely exposed, keeping tension high no matter how powerful you are. Manic fun that will hopefully have lasting appeal – if you're longing for a *Burnout/Fallout* crossover, this could be the drive of your life.






Sure, this *looks* bad, but we're just giving some new friends a lift. All under control.

UPDATE



Max meets Chumbucket. Nothing says "pleasure to meet you!" like a shotgun.

UPDATE



It looks fantastic, but we're hoping for an improved framerate for Xbox One.

PUBLISHER STUDIO WILDCARD / DEVELOPER STUDIO WILDCARD /
FORMAT XBOX ONE / ETA 2016

ARK: SURVIVAL EVOLVED

Dinosaur-centric MMO claws its way onto console

I thought this was made out of Lego?

Wrong game, silly. This is a first-person survival MMO, set on a mysterious island suffering from a major dinosaur infestation. Players can work together or not, while discovering how much dinosaurs love hurting you. Early access on PC in June looked impressive, despite a chugging framerate.

So it's *Lost* but with more dinosaurs and fewer annoying cliffhangers?

Yep, which sounds perfect to us. You're free to explore, but have to watch out for things like temperature, dehydration and how often dinosaurs chew your face off. You're not completely helpless, with crafting abilities that'll let you craft pickaxes and weapons.

Also, you collect wood by punching it off trees.

Yeah, yeah, fascinating. Get to the dinosaurs!

Suit yourself. You'll spend a lot of time fleeing, some fighting and the brave/stupid will try domesticating dinosaurs. Not easy alone, but that's why it's an MMO. Foolish players will fight; the smart will use teamwork to take on the T-rex.

So we could build a dinosaur farm?

Alas, domesticating the dinos seems to just let you ride them. Still, we can't wait to dash about on the back of a triceratops as we try to solve the mysteries of the island. Why are we here? Where did the dinos come from? Why doesn't every game have dino-riding?



Survival Evolved? They should have called it *Ark: It's Got Rideable Dinosaurs in It*. Sold!

DASHBOARD

UPDATES - NEW INFO ON THE BIG GAMES



These screens show off the new Xbox One interface. The top bar is the turn order, the bottom handles actions.

PUBLISHER FOCUS HOME INTERACTIVE / DEVELOPER LARIAN STUDIOS / FORMAT XBOX ONE / ETA LATE 2015

DIVINITY: ORIGINAL SIN

Can the excellent turn-based RPG find redemption on Xbox One?

You know what the real sin is? Constant PC-to-Xbox One ports!

Take your awful zingers elsewhere, you; this is a great RPG with innovative element-mixing combat. Use water against fire, but don't get wet unless you fancy being electrocuted (or can dry yourself off with flames). Get poisoned and you'll have to wash it off. Discovering its reactive depths is loads of fun.

Sounds good, but what makes it special?

It's a lot crazier than your average RPG, with some bizarre side quests. A shell that asks you to lob it into the ocean. A pet-pal perk that enables you to talk to animals (and accept missions from them). A fortune telling statue that offers to show you your future – say yes, and the game simply rolls the end credits. Madness.

But PC controls? On a common controller? My fingers weep.

We honestly don't see this being a problem. Analog control will make getting about easier. Combat will rely on scrolling through character abilities rather than assigning options to individual buttons like on PC – but even if that's a little slower to navigate, why will that matter in a turn-based game?

Good point, but I want a BETTER version than those smug PC posers.

Well the developer is keen to stress that this isn't just *Divinity: Original Sin* – it's the *Enhanced Edition*, and it's got some pretty drastic improvements. Offline co-op, full voice acting, new content (including a completely new ending) and improvements of parts the dev didn't like.

Buy it twice? That's fleecing me of my mum's hard-earned money!

Calm down, tightwad. Anyone who bought the original game gets a no-strings-attached-it's-yours-honestly-stop-being-polite-shut-up-and-take-it-copy of the *Enhanced Edition* for free. We're unsure if PC players can have the free update be the Xbox One version, but in this exciting age of download codes and developers who *listen to their fans*, anything is possible. This was a Kickstarted game that got rave reviews on PC last year, and it's great to see it coming to consoles – not just the standard version, either, but a more polished title. If we're going to keep getting PC ports, can we get more essentials like this, please?



Turn-based combat lets us enjoy nice effects. Usually we're too busy fleeing/screaming.



Will this be the RPG that tears us from *The Witcher 3*? Not even sleep has managed so far.

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Messages

Love letters, death threats, and some stuff about games... your comments on the mag and on Xbox

CONTACT US [f facebook.com/oxmonline](#) [t @oxm](#) [e oxm@futurenet.com](#) [w totalxbox.com](#) [yt youtube.com/officialxboxmag](#)

A strangely positive Messages this month, with an appreciation of games' end credits and a celebration of *The Witcher's* free DLC. What peace-and-love hippy nonsense is this?! We were starting to panic you'd gone soft, until we saw moaning about *CoD*, online MP and toy instruments. Ah, and all is right once more...



Credit where due

End-of-game credits are kind of like a victory cigar to me. I don't know when it started, but I can't remember not watching all of the credits after I had beaten a game. It's almost a rite of passage for me at this point. Whether there's something extra there or not, I still watch them when I've beaten a game – especially a long one. I guess I feel like it's the least I can do to say thanks to the dev team for entertaining me for the past 50-100 hours.

Derrick Crutcher

We're with you 100%, Derrick. In an ideal world, we'd all salute each and every one of the brave men and women who roll down the screen, rather than moaning about the credits being unskippable. Oh, who are we kidding? Skip, skip, COME ON, WE PRESSED 'SKIP'.

The Witcher free

So we're getting 16 DLC packs for *The Witcher 3*. 16. And they're all going to be free. FREE. It's about time a developer actually treated gamers with respect, rather than trying to trick them out of more

money after we've already paid for the game. 16. FREE.

Rachel Boland

We GET your POINT, Rachel, but we wouldn't dismiss paid DLC entirely. It can be a great way for developers to try out new things and reflect the feedback that the main game received. The DLC packs for games like *The Evil Within* and *Sunset Overdrive* are arguably better than their respective main games. Besides, without paid DLC, we could never have saddled up with that excellent horse armor in *Oblivion* – actually, let's not joke about things like that.

Access denied

I've been an Xboxer for ten years, and during that time developers have done a lot of stuff that made me smile. I wanted to get *Call of Duty: Black Ops III*, but found out that we're getting a scaled-down version for the Xbox 360! Why should I pay for the Xbox One to get the real *Black Ops* game? Come on, Activision, help the gamers out who can't afford new-generation consoles.

Shaun Woods

I just started playing last week and I'm loving it! I regret putting it off for so long! If only Scric360 could rewind time and appreciate *Life is Strange* from launch...

Star Letter

Prize: Batman: Arkham Knight

The best piece of correspondence wins a game from Matthew's goody bag

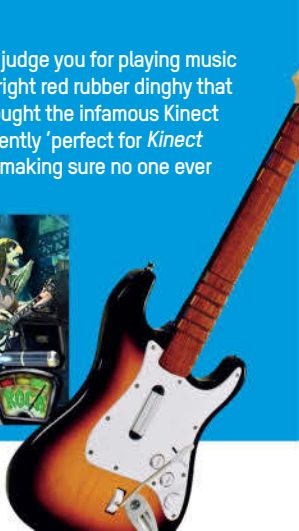


PERIPHER-HELL

I thought I'd finally seen the back of peripherals and accessories cluttering up the house, but now *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero* are coming back. I shoved all that plastic junk in the garage years ago. I can't go back to having friends over, knowing they're all secretly judging me for having a front room full of toys.

Chris May

At least your friends will only judge you for playing music games. Imagine having the bright red rubber dinghy that outs you as someone who bought the infamous Kinect Game Boat accessory? Apparently 'perfect for *Kinect Adventures*'. Also perfect for making sure no one ever visits your house again.



FROM THE MOUTHS OF GAMESRADAR+

Excerpted comments from our website

We've only seen the new-gen *Black Ops III* so far, and we can tell you now that it's a huge leap forward – one that would be impossible to recreate accurately on Xbox 360. It can be frustrating for late adopters, but if game series didn't eventually jump generation, we wouldn't have gotten *Black Ops* in the first place. We'd be playing yet another *Finest Hour* sequel. *Finest Hour 12: My, It's Getting a Bit Late*, or something. Probably.

Revolti-player

I was really hoping that after the mistakes of the last console generation, we were due a much-deserved comeback for split-screen multiplayer. Nope. Why do I have to play online in order to play against other people? I'm more than capable of tricking friends into my own home. It's time for a backlash! Some of my fondest memories are of playing *TimeSplitters 2* on Xbox (not just happiest gaming memories – happiest memories full stop). Come on Xbox One, bring back *real* multiplayer!

Matt Denton

We'd be lying if we said that *Halo: The Master Chief Collection* hadn't left us



missing more offline multiplayer options, but you have to consider what's best for the game. *Evolve*, say, would be hopeless as a split-screen game, unless everyone agreed to politely look away from the monster's corner of the screen. Besides, online multiplayer has a number of unseen advantages – when we steal all the loot before our co-op 'partner' gets a chance, it's much harder for them to punch us in the face.

We feel far less guilty about shooting someone if we don't have to look them in the eye afterwards.

//Why do I have to go online in order to play against other people?//

The Annotated... New Xbox Controller

You tell us what you'd like to see from a controller redesign



Can we stop getting 2D platformers? Xbox One has like 30 of them. Robert Barclay's opinion isn't very popular in the *OXM* office.

Lego Batman 3 had weeping angel cameos, now *The Witcher*. When's a good *Doctor Who* game coming? Roger Smith, saying what we should all be thinking.

Fallout 4 is the main hype now. Let's stay on that, please. Brandon Gardner doesn't like us dirtying his mind with non-*Fallout* facts.

Social Services

Your best/least libelous Twitter and Facebook replies



I don't want *Lego Jurassic Park*, I want a real *Jurassic Park* on the Xbox One with stunning graphics.
Matthew Clarkson



I don't see why *Arkham Knight* should be M rated. Sure, his world is a dark one, but they captured it just fine with the T rating it has had throughout the series.
Christian Griem



I'm going to celebrate *Fallout 4* by eating a Deathclaw omelet.
Hunter Sergei Strauch



Oh my God! Oh my God! Any news on *Fallout 5* yet?
Nick Griffiths



Lego Dying Light. Imagine how the dismemberment would go.
Conner J. Behan



Longer, much longer beard growth for *The Witcher 3* DLC, please. Oh, and a storage chest. Thank you!
Neal Ngn Pickhaver



You can't punish people for exploiting game bugs and glitches. Just fix them and move forward. Save the punishments for hackers and modders.
Jim Wangler



I think *AC: Unity* changed the way people play by making them want to turn the game off and go outside.
Brian Keller



Come on guys give me a chance to find Yennefer first! Let alone finish the game before I get more DLC!
Connor Young



I'm praying to God, Buddha, Allah and the rest, that the new *XCOM* will come to Xbox One.
Christopher John Ford

E3 SPECIAL

XBOX FIGHTS BACK

It's the greatest lineup of games in Xbox history – and OXM has seen them all!

The consensus from the show floor? This was Microsoft's strongest E3 since Peter 'Tattooed Man' Moore's 2006 *GTA IV* reveal. If Phil Spencer and co didn't drop any first party bombshells – so much for a *Silent Hills* buyout, eh? – they did successfully claim the next six months in the name of Xbox One. This was a confident, varied and, more importantly, *tangible* lineup – not the distant pipe dream hawked by rival platforms. And what a lineup. Classic heroes. Rampant nostalgia. Glorious tech. The news that *Scalebound*, *Crackdown* and *Quantum Break* demos slipped to

Gamescom suddenly looked less like stalling for time: the stars of Christmas 2015 have E3 in hand.

The following pages offer a first look at what's in store over the next year. A look at the multiplayer mode that sees 343 firmly stamp its identity on *Halo*'s online play. A look at the *Forza* game that we *should* have got at Xbox One's launch. A look at 30 retro classics, the welcome return of true tomb raiding and that unbeatable *Gears of War* multiplayer, buffed to a 1080p shine. And if you've been sitting on the fence, why not make the jump *and* bring your Xbox 360 library with you? Make no mistake: this is the year Xbox fights back. Hell, who would be dumb enough to stand in the way of that lot?

DEV 343 INDUSTRIES PUB MICROSOFT STUDIOS RELEASE 27 OCTOBER

HALO 5: GUARDIANS

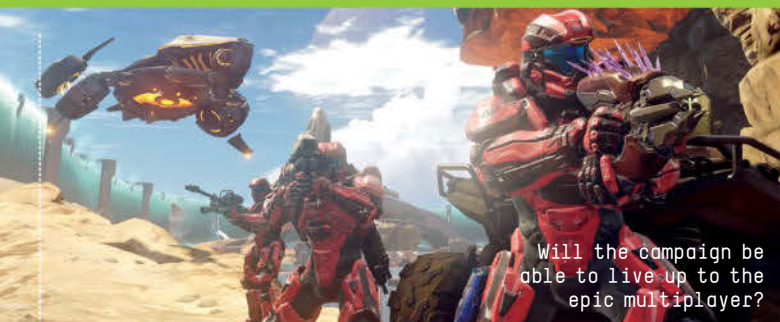
Player vs player vs everything?
Warzone might just be our
new favorite thing

If the snippet of *Halo 5*'s campaign that opened Microsoft's conference was a tad light on enemies, a trip to the demo pods showed us where they were hiding. Warzone, a new multiplayer mode, drops two teams of 12 in a landscape swarming with Covenant and Promethean forces.

If you picture Breakout, *Halo 5*'s four-on-four offering out to woo the eSports crowd, at one end of the multiplayer spectrum, Warzone sits unashamedly at the other: an everything but the kitchen sink smackdown only made possible with the technological grunt of Xbox One.

Unhelpfully pitched as "player vs player vs everything", it's better described as a hybrid of Dominion and a MOBA. Victory hinges on either amassing 1,000 points, having the most points at the end of the match, or destroying the enemy base. Hitting 1k with kills alone is just too slow. Capturing neutral bases (the Dominion bit) grants a gradual trickle of points; a good place to start. Grabbing all three of those bases not only turns a trickle into a gush, but opens up the enemy HQ for that instant victory. But this is easier said than done, due to the inclusion of AI bosses that, if toppled, grant huge point payouts.

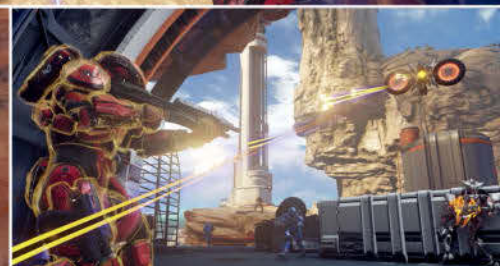
What looks chaotic from a distance reveals clearer patterns in play. Fights begin with your team punching through the Promethean forces in home base, before honing in on neutral territories. Here's where the routes to victory begin to branch. In one match we manage to take all three bases, but in hunkering down to protect them we hand a vital boss bounty to our opponents. In



Will the campaign be able to live up to the epic multiplayer?



Vehicles can be bought at Requisition Posts.



another life, our own attempt to cash-in on a pair of high value Hunters ends in several perforated Spartans and lost ground. The idea that some bosses are easier than others creates a fun tactical wrinkle, as more attractive bounties – their arrival loudly announced by the commentator – drag all 24 combatants into a *Stop that Pigeon*-style dash.

Of course, much of this assumes a level playing field. Forget that. Starting with an assault rifle and magnum, new weapons and vehicles have to be 'bought' at Requisition Posts or before a respawn. The catch? Goods unlock in tiers as your team progresses: a Warthog makes way for a Mantis, which makes way for the Phaeton, a bomb-lobbing bird of prey that feels like the Prometheans' Banshee equivalent, albeit with warping technology that lets you juke to the left or right to mislead enemy fire. The point is, firepower escalates by design, the grounded fight slowly taking to the skies, and frail soldiers replaced with squads of stomping mechs.

Interestingly, which items are available at each tier depends on the Req Packs that you unlock across *Halo 5's* online play. Bought with victories, or rewarded when you level

Human or AI, there's always something to keep you on your toes.



"IT HAS THE STRUCTURE OF A TEAM GAME, BUT THE CHAOS OF THE CAMPAIGN'S SANDBOX"

up, packs contain a mix of cosmetic items for general arena deathmatch and gear only available in Warzone. While it's wise to keep better items from contaminating competitive arena play, it's a bit disheartening to hear that packs can be bought with real-world cash – although 343 says that the money raised will go towards funding tournament prize pots. A sweet idea until some rich jerk rains down Phaetons on day one. Time will tell if this is a misjudged move.

What's evident right now is how cannily Warzone offers different things to different people. Old hands can play the vanguard, pursuing the big game, while newbies can contribute by holding down the base, or hopping on a Warthog's gun turret. It has the structure of a team game but boasts the scale and chaos of the solo campaign's sandbox. When you're faced with red team on your left and the Banshee-riding 'Baron' (one of the named

bosses) screaming up on the right, you have to remind yourself that you're not in the middle of one of *Halo 4's* Chief/Covenant/Promethean three ways. And it's every bit as cool as that sounds.

The concern is that the campaign, clearly the beating heart of *Halo 5's* promotional push, is going to struggle to live up to this action. It promises AI squadmates, vast levels and, yes, the return of Nathan Fillion, but until we dig into the Chief versus Locke rivalry, our heart belongs to Warzone.





FABLE LEGENDS

DEV LIONHEAD PUB MICROSOFT STUDIOS
RELEASE WINTER 2015

This year's conference gave us a new glimpse of *Fable Legends*' four-on-one multiplayer – wherein four players are the heroes and the more evil amongst us can choose to bring them down as the lone villain. We're told the hero experience will be familiar to anyone who's played RPGs, especially if they've played a *Fable* game before.

If you decide to be the villain, you'll engage in a sort of *Fable* RTS, and will be given 90 seconds to set up traps and monsters for the heroes to battle. Sounds like an interesting idea, and Lionhead plans to keep the game fresh with frequently updated 'Seasons'. Fancy a taste before the rest? Apply for beta access at fablelegends.com.



DEV RARE PUB MICROSOFT STUDIOS RELEASE 2016

SEA OF THIEVES

It's been two years since *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* and we're still waiting for that resurgence in [nautical] pirate games that never came. Rare has sailed to our rescue, with a new first-person multiplayer adventure set on the high seas. It's all here, too: parrots, treasure chests, being forced to walk the plank. This looks like the high seas adventure we've always wanted. It's a looker too, with luscious green island jungles and bright blue waters that couldn't be more inviting, were it not for the sharks lurking just below the surface. If we keep oohing and

ahing at those lovely looking wave effects, we're going to fall overboard.

Details are sparse at the moment, but we think that teamwork will be essential for navigating a ship, and hopefully not result in one person getting to steer while everybody else has to just sit and watch. Call us selfish, but if we're not Captain, there's going to be mutiny. An intense pirate ship battle closed the teaser, with the crew running around the deck as cannon fire sent splinters flying everywhere. Rare just lit the fuse and fired this to the top of our most wanted list.



MINECRAFT FOR HOLOLENS

DEV MOJANG/MICROSOFT STUDIOS PUB
MICROSOFT STUDIOS RELEASE TBC

Is there anyone in the world who hasn't seen *Minecraft* by now? Probably not, but until E3, we'd never seen it like this. The HoloLens user looked at a table, said 'create world' and a 3D hologram of that *Minecraft* creation emerged, block by block. The HoloLens user was able to move the world around with a few hand gestures and cause lightning strikes with voice commands. Whether we'll ever be able to perform this kind of sorcery with Xbox One games is unknown, but it was an impressive technical showcase, one that made a game we're all very familiar with look fresh again. Old *Minecraft* just won't feel the same.



DEV ARMATURE/COMCEPT PUB
MICROSOFT STUDIOS RELEASE 2016

RECORE

Here's a surprise: a partnership between *Mega Man* creator Keiji Inafune and Armature, a team of ex-*Metroid Prime* devs. You play as Jewel, one of the last humans on a mysterious world, helped through her difficult life by robot dog, Mack. The teaser showed our mecha-mutt sacrificing himself in a wave of baddie-destroying energy, leaving nothing but a blue core behind.

Without shedding a tear, Jewel jams the core into a larger robot and awakens a new friend.

Inafune has got good robot game, and there are few teams we'd trust more to stitch those designs into a sprawling action adventure than the *Prime* gang. Uploading Mack's soul into different companions gives you the drip-feed of abilities that are so key to *Metroid*'s exploration, while talk of stealing cores raises interesting potential around upgrading the companion you have or bringing a second companion to life. Sprinkle with a light dusting of sand – affecting both the world and, we presume, robotic crannies – and *ReCore* is shaping into Xbox One's most enigmatic exclusive.



DEV TURN 10 PUB MICROSOFT STUDIOS RELEASE 15 SEPTEMBER

FORZA MOTORSPORT 6

Delivering the racing thrills, come rain or shine

As polished as *Forza 5* was, Turn 10 Studios had to cut out a lot of features to get the game out of the garage in time for the Xbox One's launch. This meant a paltry 14 tracks, a little over 200 cars and no weather effects. We know having a lightweight frame can be an advantage on race day, but this is ridiculous.

Two years on, *Forza 6* is here to add some aluminum flesh to those bare bones. Around 450 cars have made the cut, and there are 25 tracks in the game, including ten brand new creations. One of these new tracks, based in the Brazilian city of Rio de Janeiro, is a perfect showcase for *Forza* to flex its graphical might. As we

The way your windshield wipers clear your screen doesn't quite convince.



"TRYING TO NAVIGATE TWISTS AND TURNS BY MOONLIGHT IS A FRAUGHT AFFAIR"

tear up a long straight, rows of gaudily-painted favelas pile up in front of us. Then suddenly the cavalcade of color drains from the screen as we disappear down a winding tunnel, only to emerge with a to-die-for view of the Christ the Redeemer statue. It's gorgeous stuff, but there wasn't time to sit and stare, as we were sharing road space with a grid of 23 aggressive AI foes – a number that hits the sweet spot in terms of making races feel populated but not gridlocked.

While graphical splendor is good and all, we were more taken with *Forza* when it shut the lights off. A nighttime race, set in Sepang, Malaysia, saw us take a Lamborghini Huracan for a spin illuminated only by far-away fireworks. Trying to navigate twists and turns by moonlight is a fraught affair.

But that's nothing compared to the herculean levels of concentration required on the Brands Hatch Circuit mid-downpour. The handling model

certainly convinces, as carelessly screeching into corners causes the car to aquaplane in a terrifying manner. It all points to a stirring comeback – a proper new-gen entry that provides the breadth of challenges and experiences that a true driving sim should.





With scenery as lush as this you'll have a hard time keeping your eyes on the road.



Wet weather and night races won't be available for every track.



DEV RARE PUB MICROSOFT STUDIOS RELEASE 4 AUGUST

RARE REPLAY

To celebrate its 30th anniversary, Rare has gone completely insane. How else can you explain its decision to release 30 games on one disc, for just £20? As if that wasn't enough, it's included a vast library of extras, making this not just your average port – this is a true celebration.

First, there's the inspired rewind feature, letting you go back several seconds and correct mistakes. It'll be in every pre-Xbox 360 game, which means someone might actually see the end of *Battletoads*. In another concession to difficulty, Rare has included 64 'snapshots' – iconic moments from games that can be played as standalone mini-games. These are favourite moments from levels that past players might not have reached, or fun spins on old games. We saw a *Jetpac* level challenge, for example,

tasking fingers to destroy ten aliens in 30 seconds. A neat way of condensing an old game to its most fun parts.

Impressive, but the oldest games are really going to show their age on our fancy modern TVs. So all Spectrum, NES and Arcade titles (*Sabre Wulf! Knight Lore! R.C. Pro-Am!*) have options to give games fake CRT displays (for the layman, it blurs out the sharpness, making the games appear like they're being played on an old television) or up-rezzed sprites. Some games even boast multiple versions on disc, such as *Battletoads*, appearing in both its NES-form and the arcade version never seen on consoles before.

We're promised tons of extras, with interviews with past developers, concept art and prototypes that never saw the light of day – until now, of course, in the biggest bargain of 2015.

"THE REWIND FEATURE MEANS SOMEONE MIGHT ACTUALLY SEE THE END OF *BATTLETOADS*"

FEATURE



ION

DEV IMPROBABLE PUB ROCKETWERKZ
RELEASE TBC

Dean Hall, creator of *DayZ* (also heading to Xbox One), has finally found a place more stressful than zombie-filled Earth: the vast expanse of space around it. *Ion* casts us as galactic colonizers as it simulates life onboard vast space vessels. It'll conjure up the workings of a space station – such as power, air pressure and heat – but more importantly, offers huge freedom. The game's systems are so deep, in fact, that it even simulates individual organs. Hall describes how one glitch saw a man's brain fall out, causing his body to simply stop working. Start holding your breath (simulated or otherwise), and pray for this to appear on Xbox Game Preview soon.



GIGANTIC

DEV MOTIGA PUB MOTIGA
RELEASE WINTER 2015

Another Xbox console exclusive – with PC cross-play – this MOBA is five-on-five deathmatch with a legendary twist: each team has a guardian. Compared to the puny heroes you play as, these Guardians are – you guessed it – very big. They're also crucial to victory. Teams get one each, and for every kill, their guardian gets closer to full power. When it does, it'll charge across the map and wound the opposing guardian, leaving them open to your attacks. It sounds mildly more strategic than your average deathmatch, and we're big fans of the cel-shaded style, too. Does it stand a chance against *Battleborn* of taking the MOBA crown on Xbox One?



DEV THE COALITION PUB MICROSOFT STUDIOS RELEASE WINTER 2016

GEARS OF WAR 4

Much as we enjoyed carving the Riftworm a new blowhole, the *Gears* trilogy's best moments are often its quieter, more suspenseful bits – the first game's search for shelter amid gathering dusk, for example, with lethal flocks of Kryll beginning to swirl beyond your flashlight beam. *Gears 4*'s first demo brings memories flooding back. We see JD and Kait chase a dinosauric predator through a mounting thunderstorm, only for it to summon allies and corner the pair. We're in the dark about

the storyline, but the weather suggests that environmental catastrophe is a key theme.

In terms of handling, it's business as usual – you'll lock to cover, choose weapons from a D-pad crossbar, and hack things up with your underslung chainsaw. That could be to the game's disadvantage, obviously, but then again, the point of the teaser was partly to demonstrate that The Coalition understands what makes Epic's old warhorse tick. Future demos will doubtless be more ambitious in scope.



DEV THE COALITION PUB MICROSOFT STUDIOS RELEASE 25 AUGUST

GEARS OF WAR: ULTIMATE EDITION

The Gears of War remaster's audio-visual perks promise an all-new sense of immersion

The curious thing about the original *Gears of War* is that for all the bombast, it's actually quite an intimate game – especially in multiplayer. The characters may be larger than life but there are only four per team. The maps may be fringed by the decomposing silhouettes of skyscrapers but they're modest in scope, and built around easily readable sightlines and elevations.

The presence of heavy weapons on the map also ensures that teams come together quickly and messily, even in the absence of map objectives. And then there's the shotgun. The Lancer rifle may rule the roost in the game's campaign, but in multiplayer it's a supporting act: point-blank Gnasher blasts coupled with surgical rolling are the key to success. Well, at least until somebody gets their hands on a Longshot rifle or the dreaded Torque Bow.

The Xbox One version of the game leaves the above mostly as is – true, the weapons have been tweaked a little, but it's not like they've bolted on an unlocks system. Nor has developer The Coalition added in many features from later *Gears of War* titles. *Gears of War 3*'s enemy marking and Tac-Com view mode are in, but you can't kick people when mantling cover, move while bleeding out or duel other players with Lancer blades.

GEARING UP

So if you're already an owner of the Xbox 360 version of the game, why should you bother splashing out for this one – the chance to mulch a younger generation of players aside? Well, the new look is the clearest incentive. Every character has been remodeled – Marcus Fenix no longer resembles a baked potato dipped in hair – and the game now runs at 60 frames per second in 1080p. The

results aren't exactly a match for *Halo 5*, but the quality of the original art direction more than makes up for the engine's shortcomings. The new version also includes an extra 90 minutes of originally PC-exclusive campaign action, plus all DLC maps ever released across PC and console.

There's no getting away from the fact that the *Ultimate Edition* is fundamentally a warm-up for 2016's big comeback, but that doesn't mean you can afford to dismiss it. Close to a decade on, it's rare to play a shooter as leanly designed as *Gears of War*, with relatively few peripheral elements to distract you from the act of redecorating a chamber with another player's viscera. So dust off your Gnasher and get stuck in.

The game will include early access to the *Gears 4* beta next spring.





DEV CRYSTAL DYNAMICS PUB MICROSOFT STUDIOS RELEASE 10 NOVEMBER

RISE OF THE TOMB RAIDER

Lara gets Syria-ous in her quest for immortality

Lara finally came in from the cold at E3, as Crystal Dynamics unveiled a brand-new *Rise of the Tomb Raider* level that transplants her out of the wastelands of Siberia and into the heat of Syria. This stage occurs earlier on in the storyline and sees Miss Croft on the trail of a Prophet's Tomb that supposedly holds the key to immortality.

If Lara wants to live forever, she has a funny way of showing it – the

"SECRET GOODIES HIDDEN WITHIN NOOKS AND CRANNIES WELCOME ADVENTUROUS CLIMBERS"

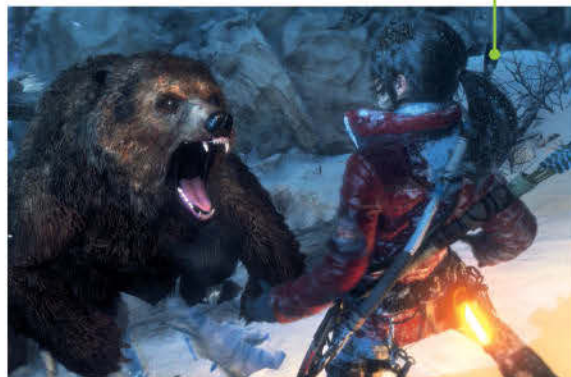
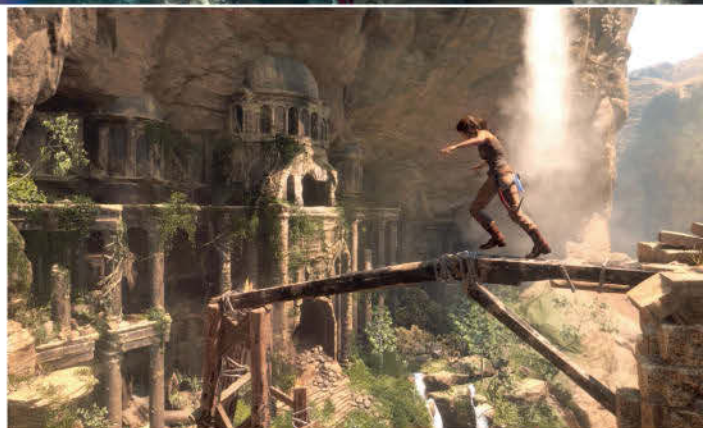
Angry beasts guard secret tombs. Bring a bow or you won't get to see them.

session begins with our tomb-raiding hero perched precariously on a dusky mountain, shimmying gingerly across a worryingly narrow ledge. As Lara nears her destination and mountainous terrain segues into the ruins of a forgotten city, she takes the opportunity to show us her climbing chops, latching onto a foothold at the base of a crumbling structure and scaling it with gusto. While this section is as linear as they come, there are secret goodies hidden within nooks and crannies that welcome adventurous climbers.

Eventually, Lara finds the opening she's looking for and slithers inside a cave, getting up close and personal with scorpions, cockroaches and other such delights until she reaches

a clearing. It's our first sight of a traditional *Tomb Raider* tomb.

An easy one to crack this, as Lara finds a secret entrance in an adjacent wall and chisels through. But we could have husked it for greater rewards. *Rise of the Tomb Raider* treats Lara's command of ancient languages as a muscle; the more ancient texts she hunts down in these dank dwellings, the more proficient she becomes at deciphering their clues, and eventually this snowballs into unlocking new routes into previously-uncharted areas of the tomb. Our demo ends with Lara stumbling upon a mountain of skeletons – a sign a great battle once took place in this chamber. Intriguing. Things are heating up, and we're not just talking about the weather.





TACOMA

DEV FULLBRIGHT COMPANY PUB FULLBRIGHT COMPANY RELEASE 2016

The creator of the critically acclaimed *Gone Home* swaps 'walking simulator' for floating simulator as it invites us to explore a mysterious, vacant space station. Little is known beyond the fact that you'll be piecing together answers from environmental details, such as letters or computer logs. Even in this early footage we see tantalizing narrative threads we can't wait to pull. Who are the holographic figures roaming the ship? Who owns the trinkets we find in the living quarters? Why does Odin, the ship's HAL-like computer, tell us that crew intel is classified? Doesn't sound promising does it? (The crew's fate, that is, not the game.) Best of all, *Tacoma* floats its way to Xbox One first.



ASHEN

DEV AURORA 44 PUB AURORA 44 RELEASE 2016

A world with no sun, draped in ashes, where 'nothing lasts, no matter how tightly you cling to it'. Are we looking at the *Limbo* of action RPGs? Just like that game, this mixes the brutal with the beautiful: simple character models show off expressive animation, and the 'lonely giant' is jaw-drop-worthy.

There's passive multiplayer, too, where it'll be up to you to deal with strangers encountered in your world, which we don't see ending well (for them, that is). No two games will be the same either, as time marches on with or without you, meaning the story you encounter depends on where you are at any given time. Hope we don't miss the juicy parts.

XBOX 360 COMES TO XBOX ONE

New-gen console, old gen games – we're finally getting the One that has it all

For many, this was the announcement of the show: Xbox One is adding backwards compatibility with Xbox 360 games. It's fantastic news, particularly for gamers with a massive library anchoring them to last-gen. Upgrade now and you'll no longer have to start from scratch, with a potentially huge selection of existing classics available.

Already available to members of the Preview program, it works like this. For compatible games, popping in the disc triggers a digital download (though you'll need the disc to boot it up every time). If you bought a digital copy to begin with, it'll redownload automatically. We say 'compatible games' as every title first needs to be converted at Microsoft's end – a process we're assured is fast, easy and at no cost to third-party publishers.

Microsoft launches the service console-wide later this year, and though it won't offer the whole library just yet, it's hoping to have at least 100 titles by the end of 2015. A poll on Microsoft's website lets you vote for the Xbox 360 games you want to be backwards compatible, so get online if you want to see your favorites return.

It may present a gradual drip-feed of compatibility, but already Xbox 360 games are being bundled with Xbox One titles as killer freebies – pick up *Fallout 4* within 90 days of release and you'll bag *Fallout 3*, too. Better still, multiplayer is going to be possible between Xbox 360 and Xbox One players, meaning you can brag to old console compatriots about being able to screenshot and record your deathmatches.



XBOX ELITE CONTROLLER

» A pro pad to take your gaming to the major league

As part of the seeming mission to reinvent Xbox One at this year's E3, the new Elite controller brings the already excellent pad up to professional-grade standards – rebuilt (and rebuildable) to perform better, offer more and will never wear out. It'll set you back \$150, but to the right kind of player, it's a price worth paying. Think of this as the controller equivalent of buying some really fancy shoes – they're ultimately doing the same job as your tatty sneakers, but they've got special buttons that allow each toe to perform a separate and important function. Here's what the new controller can do...

The top level of the controller (plus analog sticks) has been swapped out for this sleek steel. It both looks lovely and makes for a controller that will never suffer the wear we see on regular pads. The controller housing itself is a low-friction plastic, which should help stave that even further.

You'll have noticed a few additions to the back of the controller. Two sets of paddles offer pro gamers the ability to press more buttons without ever moving their thumbs off of the sticks. The green hair triggers reduce the distance it takes to push a trigger button, and offer a hard rebound to speed you up even further.



Not only can the controller be totally remapped - you can do it twice. This switch swaps between two control schemes. Microsoft introduced it by saying you can have separate on-foot and vehicle controls for *Halo*, but it'll also help pro players across disciplines - one style for *Call of Duty* and another for *FIFA*, say.



Both analog sticks and the D-pad are interchangeable, allowing for tens of configurations. The sticks can be concave, convex or extra long (perfect for snipers who need a touch more aim control), while the D-pad can take the form of a cross, or this circular business that looks a bit like Adam Jensen's shield power.

Every button, trigger and panel on the Elite can be remapped and tweaked to offer you exactly the performance you want. It's all done through an in-depth new app - no fiddly in-game menus - and saved directly onto the controller itself, meaning there's no chance of lag.



DEV STUDIO MDHR PUB ID@XBOX RELEASE 2016

CUPHEAD

Cuphead is that most treacherous of things: a game with mesmerizing art direction that'll murder you in a twinkling if you stop to stare. A 2D side-scrolling shooter, its characters and levels are inspired by risqué 1930s cartoons such as the raunchy, dark-hearted creations of Max Fleischer. Foes range from colossal spooks who toss their eyeballs at you, to a pair of frog boxers in a bustling bar. Oh, and a vegetable patch full of psychotic bouncing tubers.

The story goes that the titular Cuphead and his chum Mugman have lost a bet with the Devil, who promptly packs them off on

a worldwide rampage in exchange for their immortal souls. The basics of play are pretty familiar - you'll stomp on things, shoot fireballs from your fingertips and accrue energy for a devastating Special attack. There's also a choice of weapons, with more powerful varieties having a shorter range. Such fine distinctions can be decisive - the game's handling of attack patterns and cues is rigorous. Teaming up with a friend may be necessary for boss fights, and even then, you can expect to die constantly. The elegance with which the game captures a golden period in animation makes it all worthwhile, however.



DEV FROM SOFTWARE PUB NAMCO BANDAI RELEASE EARLY 2016

DARK SOULS III

It feels like the *Souls* series has passed a critical threshold. The last game was tremendous, but not quite the triumph its predecessor was, and much as we're eager to play the first Xbox One native installment, we're growing a little weary of gross corpse-people and everlasting dragons. The problem is partly that the third game appears to follow on directly from the first - your main foe at the time of writing is our old friend (or is it?) the Lord of Cinder, and the E3 demo level, the Wall of Lodoeth, is a quintessential *Souls* environment - moldy crypts, crumbling bridges and many a blind corner.

Still, if *Souls* has taught us anything it's that judging a book by its cover will get you killed, fast, and if *Dark Souls III*'s premise is familiar, the combat has been overhauled in fascinating ways. Players can fire bows quicker, even segueing into melee without changing gear. Weapon-specific stances offer more advanced attacks - a spinning strike for dual-blade wielders, and a guardbreak for the longsword. Enemies have learned new tricks, too. Tucked in among the vanilla undead are foes that transform during the fight, obliging you to change tactics. It won't be the last nasty surprise.



Forget post-virus New York - this is our outfit for the real Black Friday. Never stand between a man and his cheap electronics.

PUBLISHER UBISOFT MASSIVE / DEVELOPER UBISOFT / FORMAT XBOX ONE

Tom Clancy's The Division

Hands-on impressions from New York City's most godforsaken zone (no, not the discount rack at Macy's...)

Deep in the heart of *The Division's* plague-ravaged imagining of Manhattan, just north of Times Square, lies an area dubbed 'The Dark Zone'. If the Big Apple's gone rotten, then this fenced-off area is its rancid core – the area where the pandemic first took hold, and where concentrations of the virus are at its highest. According to the game's fiction, before society crumbled, the Dark Zone was quarantined off in a futile attempt to contain the virus' spread.

Evidentially the developers saw the same potential in the Dark Zone, because this is where the player vs

player (PvP) section of the action is quarantined away from the wider MMO trappings of the rest of the game. Clamber over one of the barriers to seamlessly transition into the Dark Zone and you're spoiling for a fight – but also firmly on the fast track toward finding yourself some of the rarest and most powerful loot that New York has to offer. Needless to say, we hopped over the divide mere minutes into our hands-on demo with the game at E3.

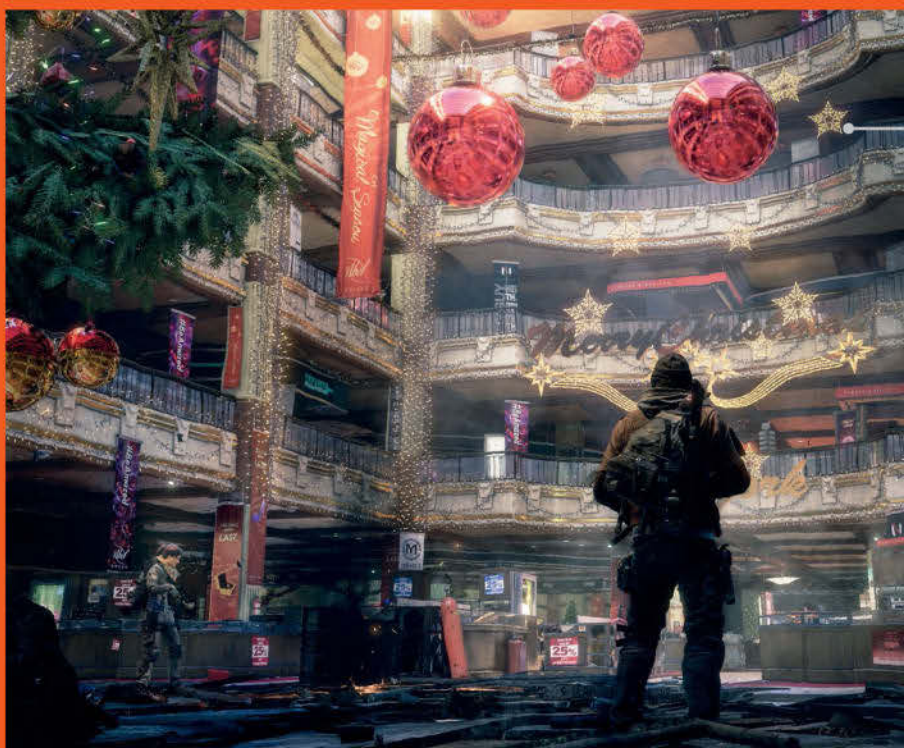
Before we do the play-by-play on our adventures deep Beyond The Wall, we need to get the obligatory next-gen gushing out of our system. They say New York is a city best visited during winter, and *The Division* agrees; this is a visually rich game that finds beauty in a city gripped at

Bluffer's Guide

Fancy some acronyms? Man, have you come to the right MMO RPG FPS. An open-world shooter set in the pandemic-stricken husk of New York, where other human players can be either friend or foe.



The turret is one of the special skills you can bring into battle. Good for laying down covering fire during more heated confrontations.



Well, at least there won't be a huge queue when stocking up on those last-minute Christmas presents. Always look on the bright side, eh?



Visually things don't look quite as shiny as the original reveal, but it is pretty and, crucially, deliverable in the final game.



Imagine if someone really did drop a virus on Black Friday. On the plus side: no contest for bargains. Then again: no living friends to brag to.



We love how it's only a recent apocalypse - the city has not yet had time to properly fall into ruin, making it much creepier.

» the height of both crisis and winter. Its streets pull the trick of appearing both dense and desolate in the same breath, and the frost crackles beneath your feet so convincingly you'll start gritting your living room carpet. The fidelity is doubly impressive when you consider the game's scale (the entirety of Manhattan, loaded in a New York minute), and really adds something to a game where you're never sure what's lying round the next corner.

Paranoia levels reach fever pitch once you're inside the Dark Zone, where intrepid explorers break away from the main storyline in search of high-end weapons and gear that can't be found anywhere else in the game. (The storyline reason is that they were left behind by the military after they had to hastily evacuate the zone when the crisis escalated.) Once in, you're placed in a team of three, and at the same time there are two other teams of three prowling the area, also in search of loot. It's a matter of when, not if, your paths cross – but what happens when you do will depend as much on circumstance as it does your natural benevolence.

Before entering the zone, it's prudent to evaluate your loadout. The guns are standard fare. It's advisable to take a mix of long-range and close-quarter weapons into the fray, as *The Division* is a cover-based shooter that is big on tactical positioning. Engagements usually begin with factions taking potshots from afar, before segueing into shotgun territory as players move tactically around the map, attempting to outflank each other unseen. The special skills are where team tactics shine. You get to take two of these into the action, one for each bumper button, and they all come in infinite supply, although usage is limited by a cooldown timer. Choices present in the demo include a movable turret, a sticky bomb fired from your primary weapon, a seeker mine that shadows your movements and hunts out targets, and pulse, which serves as a mini-radar, highlighting nearby enemies. The latter might not be the sexy option, but it's arguably the most useful. With liberal use of pulse, our team has a momentarily successful first run, ambushing unsuspecting AI grunts, looting their corpses, and then locating the high-end loot.

Unfortunately, this is the easy part. Since this loot has been loitering in the Dark Zone for so long, it can't be opened until it's been decontaminated, which can't be done until you've battled your way to a landing zone and called in a chopper for extraction. So our squad strap their radioactive bounty



PREVIEW

//Transition to the Dark Zone and you're on the fast track to finding the rarest loot NY has to offer//

Picking your cover wisely is vital during shoot-outs.

to their backpacks and march to the nearest extraction point.

First time round, we get lucky. Another team beats us to the clearing, but they're sidetracked by a team of AI bandits, allowing us to sneak unnoticed through the battlefield and call for a copter – even then, it's a tense minute and a half before it arrives. Second time isn't a charm. We arrive on the scene first, but a bungled co-ordinated sniping attempt raises the ire of another group of AI baddies – flamethrower-wielding jerks known as Cleaners, led by an Elite Cleaner, a bagel-tough

piece of work with a health bar the size of Brooklyn Bridge. They're a formidable outfit, but the flammable tanks strapped to their backs are a noted weak point,

as we discover when another human team arrives and chooses to join forces with us, shooting the unsuspecting Cleaners in their combustible backs. Score!

From there, teams have to make the decision to join forces, sharing the spoils, or go rogue, turning on each other in an attempt to steal the other's spoils. This time it ends with us on the losing end as our ranks are spread too thinly during the fight with the Cleaners, making it easier for the other team to pick us off one by one.

With no level-capping (although you have to be reasonably high level to enter), it's smart to quarantine PvP from the rest of the game. As servers populate, the Dark Zone is likely to become the domain of the highest ranked players – where only the most organized, lethal and selfish walk away with the richest of military prizes.

Alex Dale

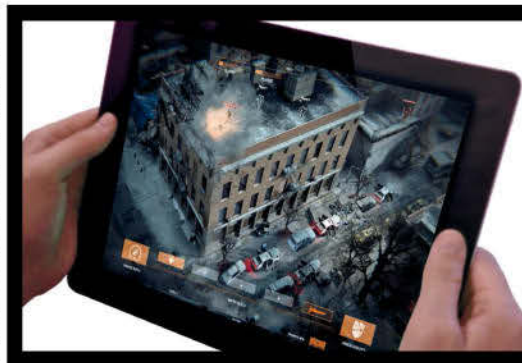


Metadata

A DEVELOPER SPEAKS!



"The Dark Zone begs you to take risks, and that extends to your inventory management," says exec producer Fred Rundqvist. "Do you dare take up valuable space with a weapon you're not at a high enough level to use?"



Appy-go-unlucky

Tipping the balance

Remember the companion app from E3 2013? Where players on tablet could act as a surveillance drone, buffing their team by marking targets up ahead, or reviving fallen allies? Well, you can forget about it, as Ubisoft has thrown it in the trash. The official reason is that the team were having trouble getting the balance right – teams with a drone would win nine times out of ten. The unofficial reason is that companion apps are, well, so 2013.



Super Brainz's flying dropkick appears to be no match for Kernel Korn's double-cobbed attack.

PUBLISHER EA / DEVELOPER POPCAP GAMES / FORMAT XBOX ONE



Plants vs Zombies: Garden Warfare 2

The meatbags move to suburbia for a table-turning sequel

Bluffer's Guide

The follow-up to the cartoony multiplayer shooter gets new modes, maps and plenty of fresh plants and rotting zombies to play as.

Before diving into our demo of *Plants vs. Zombies: Garden Warfare 2*, PopCap Games creative director Jeremy Vanhoozer describes how the dynamic has changed in the ongoing battle between the flora and the flesh-eaters. "For the first time in PvZ history, Zomboss has won and suburbia is his," he says. This table-turning twist manifests itself in many game-changing ways, making this more than another familiar follow-up.

For starters, *Garden Warfare 2* is much prettier than its predecessor,

thanks to the team's additional time learning the new-gen ropes and the power of the Frostbite engine. On top of the paint job, the series' suburban battleground has also been given a menacing makeover.

Vanhoozer promises a variety of fresh environments – from snowy tundras to a time-travel theme park – but our hands-on unfolded on the Zomboss Factory map. Featuring an appropriately evil armory, lab and aquarium, the setting is a far cry from those previously occupied by the plants. On top of robot-zombie production lines, there

are cool call-outs to series staples, such as the traffic-cone headgear.

When not ogling our surroundings, we keep a sharp eye on the newly aggressive plant life. Playing a round of Garden Ops, we and a trio of co-op pals are tasked with thwarting five waves of increasingly deadly plants, including the Weeds and Giga Torchwood. The former are minion-like hordes who mindlessly hunt and kill; the latter is a chaingun-brandishing mini-boss with a flaming stump for a body.

Thankfully, the zombies also have some new recruits. As Super Brainz, we're able to shoot lasers, deliver powerful melee attacks and land awesome dropkicks. Best of all, we can occasionally turn into an undead tornado, a screen-clearing trick that proves especially handy when Giga Torchwood gets too close for comfort. Of course, these fresh – and rotting – faces only represent a fraction of the new characters battling for the 'burbs. The final game will feature six original classes, as well as a dozen new maps and modes, including solo and local split-screen options.

Our demo barely scratches the surface of the promised delights, but we can't wait to attack as the plants and defend as the undead when the game infects consoles early next year. **Matt Cabral**

ETA
2016

//For the first time, Zomboss has won and suburbia is his//



Pick your class

New flora and fresh freaks hit the backyard battlefield

On top of turning Weeds into mulch as Super Brainz, we get a peek at some other original characters. On the zombie side, there's Captain Deadbeard, a pirate with a sniper skill and a deadly parrot. The plants have Rose, a delicate flower who possesses the ability to hover around the map and magically morph zombies into goats. Whether you plan to attack or defend, there are plenty of characters to get the job done.



PUBLISHER EA / DEVELOPER GHOST GAMES / FORMAT XBOX ONE



Need for Speed

EA's signature tire-screeching series revs up for a reboot

Bluffer's Guide

A new-gen reinvention of EA's long-running racing series, complete with seamless, story-supported integration of multiplayer.

Despite seemingly racing to the retail finish line every fall, EA's prolific *Need for Speed* series isn't actually an annually released franchise. In fact, the last installment, *Rivals*, landed nearly two years ago, just in time for Xbox One's launch.

Speaking of Microsoft's new-gen black box, the next *Need for Speed* – which developer Ghost Games' executive producer Marcus Nilsson unapologetically calls a “reboot” – is being developed from the ground up to leverage the latest hardware specs. While *Rivals* appeared across two console generations, the forthcoming entry is laser-focused on new-gen tech and its ability to deliver an uncompromising reinvention of the

long-running racer.

Need for Speed is attempting to squeeze every last polygon from the powerful Frostbite engine in an effort to bring fans the most realistic-looking, production value-packed racing game to date. According to Nilsson, who speaks as a retina-searing reel of in-game footage plays in the background, *NFS* won't just feature an open world twice the size of *Rivals*' already impressive real estate, but will pack every inch of its sprawling map with dense, richly realized details and varied opportunities to break the speed limit.

Tearing up the blacktop in this eye candy-coated world will encompass a five-pronged experience. Dubbed “five

ways to play” by Nilsson, the ambitious approach will weave a quintet of core concepts – “speed, style, crew, build and outlaw” – into a seamless, story-driven tapestry of rubber-burning thrills. Heavy-footed fans are welcome to focus on just one of these disciplines, or to balance all five to build their rep as the speed demon to beat. Of course, Nilsson suggests

the latter approach, describing the potential pulse-pounding collision of all five pillars as, “The ultimate *Need for Speed* experience... going ridiculously fast into a corner, with a highly modified car, with your friends and chased by the cops.”

While Nilsson keeps specifics buckled up tight, we know that organically bridging these parallel elements requires an online connection. That said, he promises a rich narrative ties the various focuses together in a way that should please both multiplayer enthusiasts and solo speedsters alike. Defined by what he calls “authentic urban car culture”, this story unfolds in the fictional Ventura Bay. Night racing will also be featured more prominently than in previous entries.

While our hands-off presentation felt a bit like a glorified tease, it still got us excited about getting behind the wheel again. If the ambitious ideas, eye-popping presentation, and connecting narrative can come together, *Need for Speed*'s latest lap could be its greatest yet.

Matt Cabral

ETA
3 NOV

//Every inch of the sprawling map will be packed with rich detail//



Fast friends

Real-world racing icons put the pedal to the metal

Each of *Need for Speed*'s disciplines stars a real-life car-culture celebrity. While we're uncertain who these icons are, we've seen cool footage that naturally blends filmed footage of living actors with the virtual world. The cast will progress the story as well as offer tips and guidance. Getting customization hints from, say, a professional car modder, for example, would make pimping rides a rewarding experience.

PREVIEW

ON THE E3 RADAR PART ONE

The other games
you should know
about this month



The game's Contracts mode will also be making a return.

PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX / DEVELOPER IO INTERACTIVE / FORMAT XBOX ONE

Hitman

The lack of subtitle sends a clear message. No frills. No gimmicks. This is a back to basics *Hitman*, one that embraces the criticism *Absolution* received and gives us the next-gen assassin experience we always wanted: a sandbox where we're spoiled for choice as to how we off our targets. Sneakiest stealth hit seen? Disguising Agent 47 as a bartender and serving up a poisoned drink to a fashion mogul. Or you could choose to climb a nearby tower to snipe him, or sabotage his helicopter, his fireworks, or those spiky looking lights hanging over his catwalk. There are so many potential routes it makes *Blood Money* look stingy.

These are *Hitman*'s biggest play areas yet, six or seven times bigger than those that came before and without the segmented areas that spoiled *Absolution*'s flow. Interestingly, the game will be digitally distributed. You'll pay full price at release, but missions will appear over the next year, seeing the game grow with new locations, stories and time-limited hits. A certain contract might only appear for the length of a weekend, for instance, keeping you hooked with a drip-feed of mini murders.

If this collision of episodic thinking and blockbuster scale has you concerned, we're confident that there's enough pretend murder here to keep things ticking over.

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8 DEC

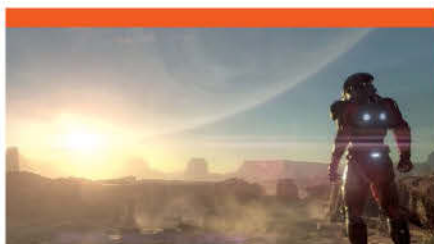


PUBLISHER UBISOFT / DEVELOPER UBISOFT MONTREAL / FORMAT XBOX ONE

For Honor

Knights! Vikings! Samurai! You know it's been a good E3 when a title that features all those things is able to slip under the radar. It's four-on-four multiplayer, with each team leading a huge AI army against the other. Ubisoft says it's all about capturing the battlefield, but for us, it was all about brutally slashing our enemies apart. Mindless hack-and-slash playing won't cut it either. Ubisoft Montreal's new 'Art of War' combat system offers much more control over a weapon, so it will be possible for you to pick which side of an enemy you want to attack or block, all with the right analogue stick. Sounds simple enough, but it led to some tense sword fights that looked like they could turn the tide of battle.

ETA
2016



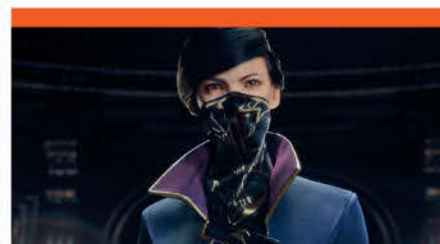
PUBLISHER EA / DEVELOPER BOWARE / FORMAT XBOX ONE

Mass Effect: Andromeda

A new story means a new galaxy. The Andromeda. Set far, far away and long after the events of *Mass Effect 3*, we're still playing as a human, male or female, with what looks like a big focus on scoping out new planets, often from the driver's seat of a revamped Mako. It looks much faster than before, a must if we're going to see everything – it's a big universe, after all. No doubt the biggest yet. But the big appeal is seeing space done

Frostbite-style: a barren rocky desert, an ice world, a toxic-looking planet with flowing lava streams – if our actual Milky Way looked as good as this there'd be no one left on Earth.

ETA
2016



PUBLISHER BETHSEDA / DEVELOPER ARKANE / FORMAT XBOX ONE

Dishonored 2

At last we're getting a sequel to 2012's excellent assassination adventure. We'll be sneaking about in the sunny city of Karnaca this time, likely limiting the shadows for us to skulk in. It's also set 15 years later than the first game, so far more advanced robots are going to be attacking you. The time jump also means that we will be able to play as a grown-up Emily Kaldwin, as well as Corvo, with their different movesets offering entirely different approaches to the same set of missions. Emily can use smoky tentacles to grapple to distant points, and can morph into a plume of goon-disorientating fog. And she'll need them to survive – the teaser shows a new villain commanding an army of clockwork samurai. Delicious.

ETA
2016



PUBLISHER UBISOFT / **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT SAN FRANCISCO / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE

South Park: The Fractured But Whole

Last year's (secretly) best Xbox 360 game gets a surprise sequel. The boys ditch playing wizards and warriors, opting instead to be superheroes. Could we be looking at the first Xbox One game to rival *Arkham Knight*? Probably not, but we're expecting another fun RPG nonetheless, with series co-creator Matt Stone saying it'll continue the new kid's story from the last game. The boys' ridiculous superhero aliases like Mysterion and Professor Chaos show up, which should delight fans. With the town of South Park thoroughly explored last time, we're interested to see where this will go next.

ETA
2016



PUBLISHER EA / **DEVELOPER** DICE / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE

Mirror's Edge: Catalyst

The best news of E3? *Mirror's Edge* is dropping the guns. Which is probably good, considering the 3,627,833 games announced where you do fire a gun. No, it was the first-person parkour that made *Mirror's Edge* special, and this time we'll be doing it without load times or levels, as Faith is set loose in an open-world adventure to enjoy exploration and time trials. Talk of gadgets that let you reach new parts of the city should lend it a slight *Metroid*-y vibe – already we've spotted about 50 skyscrapers that we can't wait to clamber, wall-run and spring our way up. We're less fussed about the focus on Faith's origins story, however, unless it revolves around her hunt for the most comfortable pair of running shoes.

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23 FEB



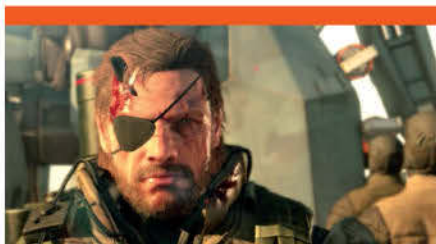
PREVIEW

PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX / **DEVELOPER** SQUARE ENIX / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE

Kingdom Hearts III

Making its Xbox debut, *Kingdom Hearts* is the RPG that manages to somehow mix the world of Disney with the baffling plotting of a JRPG. And it looks fabulous. Steering rotating teacup rides into enemies is officially the best spin attack we've ever seen. Taking a ride in a golden carriage led by Pegasus also left us giddy, as did boarding the Big Magic Mountain train and riding it into a rock monster. 'Punch', 'kick' and 'fire gun' just don't feel the same after dropping half of Disneyland on a monster's head, although the option to transform Sora's signature keyblade into a pair of pistols should liven up the hack-and-slash combat. A new *Tangled* world tops off this bright, beautiful looking game, so if that's your favorite Disney film, you're in for a treat. Although, can we advise that you get some better taste. *Frozen* is way better.

ETA
TBC



PUBLISHER KONAMI / **DEVELOPER** KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE/XBOX 360

Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain

We don't have long to wait for *The Phantom Pain* now, but when a game looks this good, two months feels like two centuries. In this new trailer, Big Boss is seen with shrapnel sticking out of his head and face, at least two people are engulfed in flames, and bodies are everywhere. There's also the return of Skull Face, Ocelot and a new Metal Gear that pursues Big Boss. Boss gets chased a lot actually – at one point, jagged rocks shoot out of the ground as he desperately tries to drive away. *Rocks that chase you*. Anyone worried this was no longer a Hideo Kojima game, consider yourselves reassured.

ETA
1 SEP

PUBLISHER UBISOFT / **DEVELOPER** UBISOFT / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE

Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Wildlands

Some games never needed to be open-world, but then we saw *Wildlands* and wondered how we ever played *Ghost Recon* any other way. The tactical shooter has you taking on drug cartels, with one shown mission involving cutting off their supply. So how do you go about it? That's up to you. Snipe the ringleader from afar, then chase down the rest of the cartel members in a vehicle. Not your style? No problem, simply wait for

nightfall, then sneak around the compound, taking out everyone in turn and stealing the supply. Don't like stealth? Then send in an explosive drone to take out your enemy, or at least provide a distraction. The gigantic Bolivian setting looks fantastic, *Far Cry* in everything but name, and it seems we can take missions in any order we choose, then execute them how we want. Few games offer that level of freedom – we can't remember the last time we were this excited for a *Ghost Recon*.

ETA
TBC





Vehicles will flatten plants, letting you carve crop circles in the colorful fields.

PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX / DEVELOPER AVALANCHE STUDIOS / FORMAT XBOX ONE

Just Cause 3

Come the revolution, real-world physics will be the first against the wall

Bluffer's Guide

One-man army returns home to pull apart military oppressors brick by brick. Just try to leave something standing for the innocent public, yeah?

Story, we're told, is key to *Just Cause 3*. Something about Rico returning to his home island of Medici to plant seeds of revolution against its cruel occupiers.

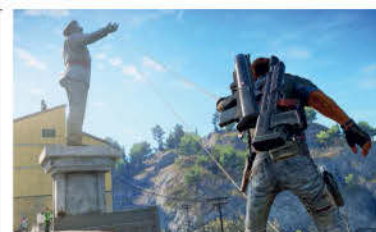
That's all fine, but we're not sure that a lack of dramatic framing was ever *Just Cause's* problem. Rico's as thinly drawn a character as they come – he's just a comedy accent holding a machine gun – and it's not like we need motivation to tie a spherical pressure vessel to a helicopter and swing it like a wrecking ball. And how does Rico's 'local hero' shtick explain the old lady we terrorized? We guess she could have been evil – it's hard to ascertain someone's political sympathies when you're dragging them from a moped.

Everyone in *Just Cause 3* is a storyteller, only instead of a pen you write the yarn with a grappling hook and use mushroom clouds for punctuation. The hook's contracting rope is a joy, letting you tether two objects and slam them together with a left-trigger squeeze. You begin by knocking guards' heads together;

then knocking guards' heads and trucks together; then knocking guards' heads and buildings together. That troublesome helicopter? Pull it into the ground. Armored vehicle bringing reinforcements?

Attach to a roof and watch it dangle from the gutter like one of Spider-Man's webbed-up goons. It's almost so powerful as to be game-breaking.

That it doesn't also yank the difficulty curve into the x-axis is due to a) the size of the army Rico's up against, and b) the size of the installations he's trying to destroy. Liberating a town may be as simple as tearing down the propaganda and freeing the police station, but next door is a towering communication



dish with four support platforms and enough guards to fill them all. Here the grap hook is better used to zip Rico between chimneys to avoid the guns below – and hey, while you're up there, why not plant some C-4 to bring the whole lot tumbling down? Destruction is not fully simulated à la *Red Faction: Guerrilla*, but the bespoke Havok setup still makes for convincing collapses.

It's not all flames and screams, of course. Combining the rope with Rico's parachute makes for serene sightseeing as you latch onto scenery to tug yourself ever higher. Yes, you can rain down grenades while you're up there, but it almost seems perverse to ruin the sunflower fields that stretch out beneath you. The wingsuit is less

//You write stories with a grappling hook and use booms for punctuation//

ETA
WINTER



You can prepare for this kind of chaos by bundling together weapons/vehicles in a crate and having it airdropped into the field.

Metadata

BEST BIT...



Why take on vehicles on a bridge when you can simply destroy the bridge beneath them? Attaching C4 to the struts and watching the chunks of collapsing masonry roll down a hill [see pic above] is pretty special.

relaxing, its fast descent requiring quick reflexes to swoop you forward. Our first hour with it is mostly spent grazing Rico's face against the tarmac, but hit the right rhythm and you can hurtle down roads and, if you're brave, through Medici's winding tunnels.

What's yet to be seen is how Avalanche will tether these abilities into enjoyable missions – always *Just Cause's* weakest link. For the time being, we've a hot date with a granny, some rope and a moped.

Matthew Castle

The satellite dish crumbles piece by piece with the right combo of rope and C-4. Yes!



PREVIEW

Anders Bodbacka

Avalanche's senior technical designer talks explosion physics and how Rico is just Mario in disguise...

OXM: What aims did you set out with?

We wanted destruction to be more physics-driven and more like a fun toybox that can be used as part of the gameplay. More than looking pretty and going boom, if you tether things correctly you can use them defensively or create cascading destruction – destroying an entire base just by pulling one tether. That wasn't possible before, but improvements in technology let you do this stuff.

OXM: How did you evolve this cinematic chaos?

Finding that sweet spot between cool and realistic is difficult. It's really about creating drama in destruction. If you shoot one thing and it goes boom, you can do it a couple of times and know it'll go boom – and soon it's not so much fun. But if you attach it to a helicopter or shoot its supports and they crumble and it begins to roll away... well, you're now directing all that destruction. You're Michael Bay.

OXM: Do you place items to shape destruction?

The good thing about using the Havok physics is not scripting events – by just placing things in a general area, you create something unique. If you know a barrel causes so much damage you can think, 'I need to place the barrel approximately here and it will affect this or that object.' But you still have the option to tether a barrel to a

government is destructible – so by destroying those things, you make the world more beautiful. We wanted a beautiful world that's worthy of destruction – you want to free this world. In order to do that we have populated towns that feel like they are alive so there's something to care about and fight for. These people are oppressed and you can feel it when you are

// We wanted a beautiful world that's worthy of destruction – you want to free the world, so we have towns that feel alive //

helicopter to destroy it, or you tether it to the helicopter, take over that helicopter and fly them both into a base. Not designing is part of designing.

OXM: How do you decide the level of destruction?

The main philosophy behind the game is to beautify the world through destruction, so everything built by the

nearby – liberate an area and suddenly everyone is out drinking in the street. It's a totally different environment.

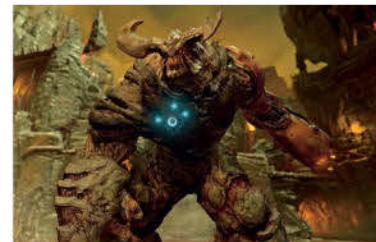
OXM: I love the fireworks that go off when you save a town. It's like the end of a Mario level.

Yes! You even grab a flag.

OXM: JC3 is basically Mario with explosions.

PREVIEW

They've just spotted the Chainsaw. Yeah, you know what's coming. Bring it on...



PUBLISHER BETHESDA / DEVELOPER ID SOFTWARE / FORMAT XBOX ONE

DOOM

id Software's shooter shows real guts (all over the floor)

Bluffer's Guide

A reboot of the classic 1993 PC title set on Mars. Expect demons, gore and a whole lot of death.

After going through a bit of a developmental nightmare, which included the complete binning of an entire version of the game, *DOOM* (not 4, all caps, please) has finally been revealed.

Classic *Doom* was always about fast-paced combat, running about mazes full of evil hellspawn, dodging their attacks and firing back with your own from a frankly iconic arsenal of weaponry, and this respawned *DOOM* appears to be bringing that core concept right up to date. The main level we've seen is set in a blast furnace facility – on Mars, of course – and it appears to be huge. Platforms hang from above, walkways connect areas together and there's plenty of stuff lurking beneath you too.

To help you get around, you can now double jump. Hardly a classic *Doom* mechanic but it really helps recapture

that feeling of speed in these larger, fully 3D areas. Being able to quickly scale platforms, clear considerable distances and dodge enemy fire means that id Software can be far more creative with the level design and the way that the enemies try to get at you. The classic beasts return, albeit looking a lot like shinier next-gen versions of their *Doom 3* counterparts, and attack you from all angles, climbing ledges and tossing fireballs from all sorts of places, trying to end your life.

Unsurprisingly, as a game that's almost always mentioned whenever the 'violence in video games' debate is brought up, *DOOM* is extremely violent. A point-blank shotgun blast will paint a wall with enemy blood and send the remaining bits of midsection flying. Machine gun fire rips chunks of flesh away as the bullets impact, while the chainsaw can

be used to cut them into bloody pieces. There are also now finishing moves that can polish off a weakened enemy. These range from 'simply' tearing their heart out and crushing it, to ripping off their leg and using it to cave their head in. The initial concern is that, even in the limited amount of stuff we've seen, these finishing moves had already started

to repeat. When you've seen one demon's jawbone yanked off, you've seen them all.

The 'Snapmap' editor, which looks like a surprisingly robust map creation tool for either the four-player deathmatch or co-op horde mode, allows you to snap together pieces of a level like Lego and drop items, enemies and simple scripting into them, creating traps and set-pieces with ease.

Doom 3 was released to a mixed reception and, after the news of the cancelled project a year or so ago, it was looking like *DOOM* was a game – ahem – 'doomed' to failure. Fear not: it is heading for release next spring, and is looking set to give you hell.

Andi Hamilton

ETA
SPRING

//Classic beasts return, attacking from all angles, tossing fireballs//

THE WEAPONS OF DOOM

DOUBLE-BARRELED SHOTGUN



PLASMA RIFLE



THE CHAINSAW

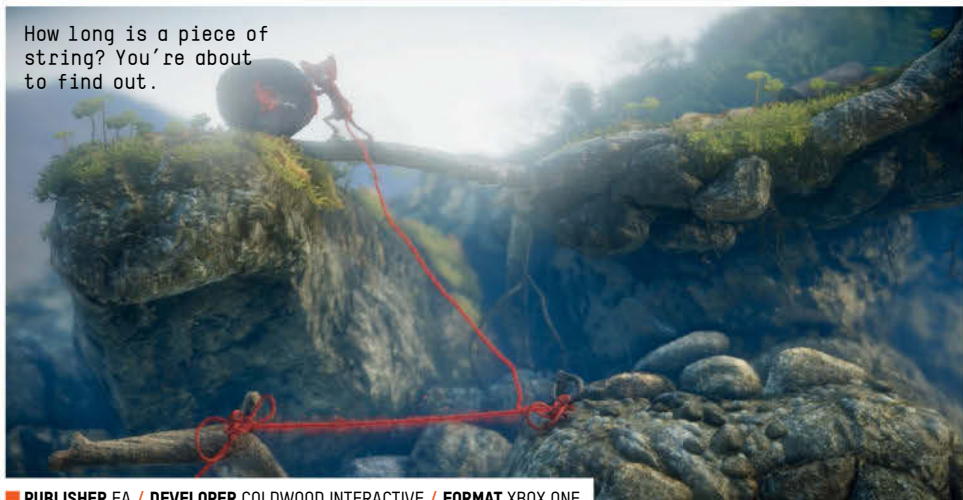


THE BFG-9000



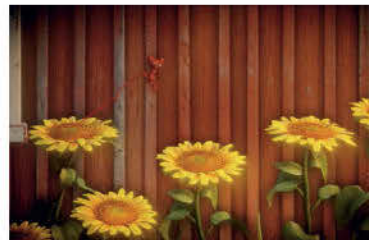
Doom's arsenal of weaponry is legendary. Which classics are making their return in the new version?

How long is a piece of string? You're about to find out.



PUBLISHER EA / DEVELOPER COLDWOOD INTERACTIVE / FORMAT XBOX ONE

PREVIEW



Unravel

Move over Yoshi: Unravel is the new textile adventure in town

Bluffer's Guide

An adorable yarn-based platformer to compete with the likes of Yarn Yoshi, *Unravel* might have a little more to it, woven deep in its fibers.

At a recent showcase of the games EA has on deck for this summer and beyond, a surprisingly large crowd clustered around a single television, cheering on the digital figure on-screen. This crowd wasn't checking out a rousing round of *Madden*, or blasting through *Battlefront*, or enthralled by the beauty of a brand new BioWare epic – they were instead watching a doll made of yarn push apples as big as its whole body into a puddle, swing over a garden fence, and then run for its life from a rock rolling down a hill.

That doll is Yarny, the star of new puzzle platformer *Unravel*, a tiny magical helper who braves the dangers

of the outside world (with all its deadly birdbaths and forest paths) to help his master mend something important. It's so charming it could make even the most jaded shooter diehard crack a smile, but developer Coldwood Interactive wants Yarny's journey to be more than just cute: "If players give me that most precious and valuable gift of their time, then I feel that I kind of owe them something back in return," says creative director Martin Sahlin. "I have to try to make my game enrich them somehow, to make it meaningful to them."

Before he can get that far though, Yarny needs to navigate his owner's backyard, which he does by platforming and solving puzzles through the power of yarn. That can

mean using his own fibers to swing between a number of tree branches, or pull objects on the forest floor together in order to make a bridge. All that while avoiding a plethora of dangerous obstacles, that nearly go so far as to make *Unravel* look like a less graphic version of *Limbo*, as Yarny sinks to the bottom of a puddle or gets flattened by a stone.



Hang by a thread

Using yarn effectively is the key to keeping our stringy hero in one piece.

Even that can be dangerous though, as he leaves behind a trail of yarn and loses more with every move he makes, so collecting scattered pieces of yarn along the way is crucial to keeping him whole.

While that might seem like a chore on first read, the bright red path you leave creates a fun, fascinating look at how far you've managed to come. "Sometimes when you solve something really complicated, you look back at that complex, weird, weaving mess of a thing behind you and just wonder, 'How did I even end up here?'" says Sahlin. "The gameplay is all about obstacles that life places in your path and how you overcome them."

That's all we know about the game for now, but we'll be able to see more of Yarny and the tangled webs he weaves in the months to come. Until then, we'll be watching out for *Unravel* with *wrapped* attention.

Ashley Reed

//It'll make even the most jaded shooter diehard crack a smile//



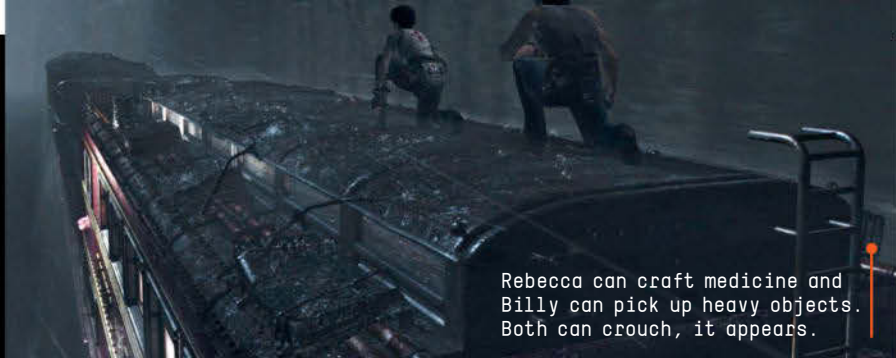
Everyday strife

How normal is abnormal?

While everything looks a lot bigger from Yarny's point of view, *Unravel* takes place in a familiar place, the sort you might find beyond your own back door. According to Sahlin, that's exactly the world the team wants to explore: "Videogame environments are often out there, very sci-fi or fantasy. You rarely see the stuff that's actually right there in front of you. I wanted to make a game about appreciating the beauty in the real world, that's right there for you to find."

ON THE E3 RADAR PART TWO

The other games you should know about this month



Rebecca can craft medicine and Billy can pick up heavy objects. Both can crouch, it appears.

PUBLISHER CAPCOM / DEVELOPER CAPCOM / FORMAT XBOX 360, XBOX ONE

Resident Evil Zero HD Remaster

From the brief splatterings of gameplay footage hidden in *Resident Evil Zero's* gore-drenched announcement trailer, it appears that this cult survival-horror classic

– a prequel to the original *Resident Evil*, originally released on the Nintendo GameCube in 2002 – is scrubbing up pretty nicely in HD, thank you.

We've seen precious little of *Resi Zero* since that time; only a half-assed port on Wii in 2008. But this marks the game's debut outside of the Nintendo bubble, and that gets a severed-thumbs-up from us. While its design is showing its age, it distinguishes itself with a well-implemented

'hotswap' mechanic, allowing you to flit between permanently bickering teammates Rebecca Chambers and Billy Coen to solve environmental puzzles – which inevitably draw the pair further apart than they'd like.

Razor-sharp resolutions and a widescreen camera give a fresh look, but sadly not fresh perspectives – the fixed camera and flick-screen transitions remain, as it would be impossible to transplant in a modern camera without a big shakeup. That said there's no need to be unduly put off; just like the *Resident Evil HD Remake* from earlier in the year, concessions to the control system make the aged design more palatable to modern fingers.

ETA
2016



PUBLISHER 505 GAMES / DEVELOPER KUNOS SIMULAZIONI / FORMAT XBOX ONE

Assetto Corsa

The title is Italian for 'Racing Setup', which is your first clue that this isn't going to be one of those racers where you drift sideways across the scales of a dragon's back on wheels made of cake. But it comes highly recommended in PC racing circles, where it's been out for a few years now. PC pundits praise the realistic handling and bumper lineup of hypercars, while pouring scorn on its uninspired career mode and Italy-centric track listing. But what really gets motors revving is the extensive car and track modding – the game even comes packaged with editing software. But can the console version

hope to offer the same customization options? We say [quickly flips through translation guide for Italian word for 'oh er, no']. But when the racing feels this good, who cares?

ETA
2016



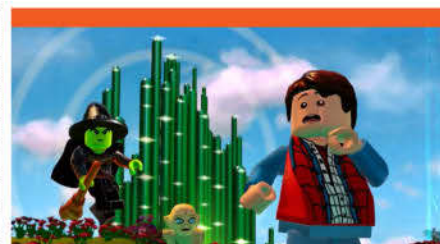
PUBLISHER DISNEY INTERACTIVE STUDIOS / DEVELOPER AVALANCHE SOFTWARE / FORMAT XBOX 360, XBOX ONE

Disney Infinity 3.0

Are you ready to run the yearly 'interactive toy game' gauntlet? While the action rarely excites, for kids the prospect of scanning a loved toy figurine into a game and seeing it come to life is intoxicatingly magic, and that's why these games have cash-strapped parents gasping for air like they're in a Darth Vader neck squeeze. An inelegantly shoehorned-in reference that segues us nicely to the main thrust of this year's *Disney Infinity: Star Wars*. More specifically, the original prequel, where you'll be able to explore open-world versions of iconic film locations such as

Tatooine and Endor. Rideable Banthas, X-Wing battles and epic wars against cartoony AT-ATs are all on the menu as Disney looks to turn your bank account to the Red Side.

ETA
AUTUMN



PUBLISHER WARNER BROS INTERACTIVE / DEVELOPER TRAVELLER'S TALES / FORMAT XBOX 360, XBOX ONE

Lego Dimensions

While *Disney Infinity* doesn't let its alternative universes play nicely with one another – aside from in its sandboxy Toy Box mode – Lego's first foray into the emerging 'videogame plus real toys' genre is all for it. So, in *Lego Dimensions*, you're able to make the crossover fanfic of your (non-sexual) dreams, something we are most excited for (er, again, not like that). Wanna see Gandalf solve mysteries with the *Scooby-Doo* gang? Can do! Always thought that Homer Simpson would love a ride in the TARDIS? Let's give it a shot!

Fancy seeing Batman skip down the Yellow Brick Road with the winged monkeys from *The Wizard of Oz*? Whatever you want – just don't cut me, weird guy!

ETA
SEP



PUBLISHER ACTIVISION / **DEVELOPER** VICARIOUS VISIONS / **FORMAT** XBOX 360, XBOX ONE

Skylanders SuperChargers

Last, and quite possibly least, in the interactive-toy lineup, we have *Skylanders*. Activision's billion-dollar franchise might have invented the sub-genre in the first place, but without the same access to a revolving door of licenses, it's struggled to find ways to convince players to shell out on new figurines without crudely blocking off chunks of the game. This year's twist is no different: vehicles. The titular SuperChargers command a range of 'em over land, sea and air. You *could* complete it without splashing out on a plastic vehicle, but then be missing out on the [admittedly quite slick] vehicular sections. Each has its own handling and stats, so best get your kid to pick out their fave at a friend's house before shelling out all your precious bucks.

ETA
20 SEP

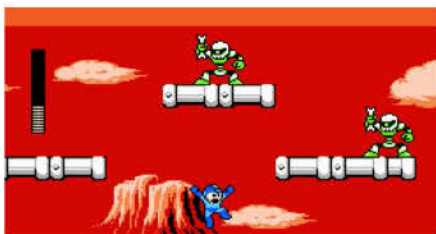


PUBLISHER ACTIVISION / **DEVELOPER** ROBOMODO / **DISRUPTIVE GAMES** / **FORMAT** XBOX 360, XBOX ONE

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 5

Accidentally revealed on Instagram by an over-eager chef at an industry event a few months ago, early hands-on impressions suggest the latest entry in the skateboarding series needs a little longer in the oven. This is an attempt to recapture the series' halcyon days – sprawling open worlds bail in favour of tight, focused stages designed for score-attack runs. Each is littered with mini-challenges, including terribly misguided sections where you shoot at targets with giant fireballs. The skate park layouts we've seen so far don't exactly thrill – but maybe you'll do better, as the create-a-park suite is back in a big way.

ETA
AUTUMN



PUBLISHER CAPCOM / **DEVELOPER** DIGITAL ECLIPSE / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE

Mega Man Legacy Collection

This unassuming retro collection's press release comes with a statement that's brassier than its hero's shiny alloy undercrackers: Digital Eclipse, the team porting the games to Xbox One, is on a mission to save videogame history. "Movies have the Criterion Collection, but there hasn't been anything like that for games," says head of restoration Frank Cifaldi. "We're not doing a very good job of making sure our games will be available five years from now, let alone 50." *Mega Man Legacy Collection* features high-quality ports of Mega Man's six NES adventures, plus a new mode that offers remixed platforming challenges drawn from across all six titles, as well as a digital museum where you can gaze at concept art and sigh.

ETA
WINTER



PREVIEW

PUBLISHER BANDAI NAMCO / **DEVELOPER** MILESTONE SRL / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE

Sébastien Loeb Rally Evo

A new series from Milestone, developer of the *MotoGP* and *WRC* franchises, that lets you relive rally driver Loeb's illustrious career. From our brief hands-on, Milestone seems to have pulled out all the stops to make this the most realistic rally game on the market. Everything is recreated, down to details as minor as making sure the vegetation is what you'd find on actual tracks. No weird cucumbers here, thank you. Loeb himself has been involved with making sure physics are accurate to his experience, and it feels like it's paid off. Handling is excellent, the cars feel weighty and we couldn't get enough of that accurate track vegetation/sense of speed. It's hardly a crowded genre, but this will be the rally title to beat on Xbox One.

ETA
AUTUMN

PUBLISHER HARMONIX / **DEVELOPER** HARMONIX / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE

Rock Band 4

The restless crowd are screaming requests at the band. "Play over 1,500 songs from previous DLC!" "Play with my old Xbox 360 instruments!" "Play The Weather Girls' entire back catalog!" Harmonix's response? Yes! Yes! And get out. A great start, but how does it play? Well, it's more or less the same *Rock Band* – for better and for worse. We only had to get halfway through Tenacious D's *Tribute* for the illusion to sink back in that we were actually in the band. Vocals have the most noticeable upgrade. No auto-tune horrors here, but the promised leeway to sing more to your own style

did impress. Failure is reserved for only the most tuneless crooners, with anyone singing along competently winning over the crowd. Drum solos are now more matched to the style of song you're performing – a small change, but a smart one. Bass and lead guitar felt pretty unchanged, but we're yet to test the new instruments. So it's still great fun, but very much 2010-flavored fun. Right now, *Rock Band 4* isn't the groundbreaking concept album – more of a solid greatest-hits compilation. We'll have to see how it compares next to *Guitar Hero Live*'s Sergeant Pepper/Chinese Democracy (delete with hindsight) of a game later this year.

ETA
2015





Fall of the Machine

Deus Ex: Mankind Divided imagines a civilization at war with its own technology. We travel to Eidos Montreal's HQ to see this spectacular Xbox One cyberpunk sequel in action

Words: Edwin Evans-Thirlwell

FEATURE

Mankind Divided's new daytime missions lighten the color palette, but not the mood.

Deep in the heart of Prague's 'Golem City' – a teetering labyrinth of habitation modules, piled as high as skyscrapers to create slum housing for an underclass of mechanically augmented human beings – a chance tumble of fluorescent lighting tubes forms a jagged angel shape. It dangles over a vista of polystyrene candle-holders and power cables, ornate vintage benches, 24/7 news vids, merchants' chalkboards ringed by circus bulbs, and steaming joints of meat.

At first glance it's just another piece of tragic, picturesque clutter, like the brashly decorated placards and pamphlets dropped by 'aug' protesters as they're set upon by police, but there's more to this broken silhouette than that. The angel is a buried link between the symbolic strategies of *Deus Ex: Mankind Divided* and 2010's acclaimed *Human Revolution*. It's the after-image of the latter's Icarus motif – the spectacle of a winged man soaring toward the sun, representative of what developer Eidos Montreal terms the *Deus Ex* universe's Golden Age, in which the scientific ideals of the European Renaissance were applied to the icky business of blending mechanisms with human flesh.

In *Mankind Divided*, that motif and that spirit of experimentation have been shattered and driven underground, as augmented people – most still dependent on costly supplies of Neuropozyne to stop their bodies rejecting their implants – are segregated and brutalized following an outbreak of remotely induced mass psychosis at the climax of the previous game. "It's no longer the haves and the have-nots," summarizes narrative director Mary DeMarle. "It's more of an 'us versus them' scenario." Looming large amid the chaos are the agents of the Illuminati, a collective of sinister one-percenters who are only too happy to manipulate the public's fear of an aug uprising for political gain.



The revamped HUD makes for less of a break between action and customization – very slick indeed.



// WILL EIDOS MONTREAL REMAKE THE FIRST DEUS EX? //

IT'S EASY TO FORGET THAT THE ORIGINAL GAME, RELEASED BY ION STORM IN 2000, TAKES PLACE DECADES AFTER THE EVENTS OF EIDOS MONTREAL'S GAMES. WILL THE NEW DEVELOPER END UP EFFECTIVELY CREATING ITS OWN VERSION OF THIS ELDERLY CLASSIC, ONCE THE TIMELINE CATCHES UP? EXECUTIVE ART DIRECTOR JONATHAN JACQUES-BELLETÉ SUGGESTS IT'S A POSSIBILITY...

"I think we could totally connect our games exactly to how the first *Deus Ex* went," he says. "I think so. It just makes sense. Because you see in the first one, the stage is already set. Gunther and Anna, they're relics, mechanically augmented, and there are tons of jokes about that in the game - 'rusty old toasters', 'tin cans' - because the new augmented people are [genetically enhanced] guys like JC Denton and Walton Simons. So the stage is all set."

"There are things we'd need to change because the game was obviously designed in 1998, 1999, so there's a lot of stuff where the televisions are still a 4:3 ratio, the phones all have lines, there are no real cellphones. Obviously these are things we wouldn't repeat if we had to redo the first game. But the story itself, the core of what it's all about - perfectly fine."



"THE SPECIALIZED ANTI-AUG POLICE WEAR EXOSUITS MODELED TO RESEMBLE MEDIEVAL ARMOR"

Human Revolution was characterized - to a slightly exhausting degree - by powerful visual juxtapositions, pitting the golden hues, textiles and fluting iconography of the so-called 'cyber-renaissance' against the somber palette and imposing concrete regularity of corporate dystopia. *Mankind Divided* isn't so much characterized as plagued, paralyzed by these contrasts. Racked as they are by skirmishes between styles - venerable oak furniture piled high with silver datapads and servers, plush crimson fabrics spilling across the inside of an office cubicle - the new game's larger, more complex environments speak directly to the narrative's portrait of a society driven mad by fear of the 'unnatural' or 'impure'.

There are plenty of non-metaphorical skirmishes underway, of course. As our demo handler guides the camera through a populous area, illuminated by blazing oil drums and the

spotlights of flying drones, enforcers are seen frisking cyborg vagrants. As in *Human Revolution*, political affiliations are tied heavily to dress sense. The world's specialized anti-aug police wear their own tech enhancements on the outside in the shape of exosuits, modeled to resemble medieval armor with jutting shoulder pads and full-face visors. The most terrifying of the lot drive bipedal mechs, their headlights calling to mind the baleful glow of a Big Daddy's portholes. It's wise to invest in a few boxes of EMP rounds before going up against these guys.

Long division

This culture clash isn't just there for the sake of striking costumes or scenery. It creates and guides the choices you'll make as returning protagonist Adam Jensen - how you'll fight or explore, who you'll trust, who you'll save and who you'll kill. To begin with, the writing's

FEATURE

» KNUCKLE TASER

Seeking to make non-lethal combat more fun, Eidos Montreal has upgraded Adam's trusty right hook to support a short-ranged electrical stun attack.

PEPS LAUNCHER

Favor the direct approach? This punishing energy cannon folds out of Jensen's wrist and inflicts heavy damage and knockback on an unshielded target. It has a short charging period, however, so don't try it out when you're close to death.

NANOBLADE CROSSBOW

Those slick squared-off elbow katanas can now be launched, perforating an enemy silently. You can even use them to skewer several people at once, or pin them to surfaces.

SWISS ARMY MAN

THERE ARE PLENTY OF RETURNING AUGMENTATIONS IN MANKIND DIVIDED, BUT WE SUSPECT YOU'RE MORE EAGER TO HEAR ABOUT THE NEW GIZMOS. IT'S A BAD CRAFTSMAN WHO BLAMES HIS TOOLS, ESPECIALLY WHEN THEY'RE AS DEVASTATING AS THESE

REMOTE HACK

Jensen's shortage of Wi-Fi functions was always a bit weird - after all, this is the guy with sunshades built right into his face. In *Mankind Divided*, you can at last fiddle with certain electronic devices from afar, unlocking new routes or creating distractions.

WALL-PENETRATING IMAGER

One of the last game's more useful augs has become even handier. It enables you to see detailed information about scanned enemies, including what they're armed with. Our demo handler toggled it on and off continuously during firefights.

ICARUS DASH

Perhaps the most significant of the new augs, this short dash move calls to mind the Blink spell of *Dishonored* in that you can wield it in mid-air - whether to get the drop on a dug-in enemy, or cross an open area unseen without activating your cloak.

TITAN

The last game let you gradually increase your resilience. The Titan is more of a quick-fix tool - it gives you a short-lived diamond skin (which, somewhat amusingly, doesn't currently cover up Jensen's hair). In a neat touch, sound is muffled while using the ability.

// THE PROSPECT OF MULTIPLAYER //

EIDOS MONTREAL IS FIRMLY AGAINST THE IDEA OF ADDING PVP OR PVE MODES TO DEUS EX FOR THE SAKE OF PARITY WITH OTHER BLOCKBUSTER TITLES AND SERIES, WITH GLOBAL EXECUTIVE BRAND DIRECTOR ANDRE VU POINTING OUT THAT IT'S DIFFICULT (NOT TO MENTION EXPENSIVE) TO ADD MULTIPLAYER TO A STORY-LED ROLE-PLAYER LIKE MANKIND DIVIDED IN A MEANINGFUL WAY. THAT SAID, THE DEUS EX FICTION'S PLETHORA OF CONNECTED DEVICES SEEM LIKE A GOOD FOUNDATION FOR AN ONLINE GAME, AND VU SUGGESTS THAT THIS MIGHT BE AN OPTION IN FUTURE

"Mass Effect 3's multiplayer is a very good experience," he notes. "It's proof that it can be done. I'm not saying that we can't do it, but you know [BioWare is] in the fourth iteration [of its game] now, almost, whereas we're only on the second of ours. There's a lot of learning we need to go through!"

"In the future, I think if we were to go in that direction it would have to be the topic of the game itself," muses gameplay director Patrick Fortier. "The way we're applying the formula, in the sense of the narrative component [impacting] all across the different disciplines, I think it would have to be that it makes sense story-wise."

Bringing in another studio to handle multiplayer as Ubisoft has with *Assassin's Creed* is out of the question, Fortier adds: "I don't think it's something that can be tacked on and supported sufficiently well through a third-party developer, out of the office. It has to be fundamentally right from day one that you're trying to do that. You have to have the right idea and the right vehicle."

DEUS EX: MANKIND DIVIDED



preoccupation with the backlash to *Human Revolution*'s technological advances means this can't be a game defined by fancy new gadgets, although there are plenty on offer. It's a question, rather, of how fluidly and intuitively those tools are deployed – particularly with regard to combat and the game's newly open-ended boss fights [see 'Management Shift', page 64].

The concept of a society split from the outset between vanilla humans and body-modders also lends itself to a plot that doesn't hinge, as *Human Revolution*'s did, on the choices you make at the end. You won't be able to reload your final save and experience a different conclusion: Jensen must pick sides continuously as he negotiates regions like Golem City, and every decision has a deluge of consequences, both immediate and long-term.

Simply crossing the street to thwart a mugging as you head to an objective could start a narrative snowball rolling, to dangerous effect. Donating some of your own Neuropozyne to a field doctor could result in a warmer reception elsewhere in the world. A target that needs to be extracted might be more disposed to come quietly – or even share some intel – if you refrain from carving up his entourage on the way to his chambers. "Choices you make early in the game will cut off characters and storylines for you, will affect your ending decisions, will create opportunities for you down the line," observes DeMarle. Sounds like a perfect excuse for multiple playthroughs to us.

Where *Human Revolution* cast you as a luckless pawn caught in the crossfire, the sequel takes a turn in the direction of *Splinter Cell*. With his old employer Sarif Industries in ruins, Jensen has joined Interpol as the leader of an international counter-terrorism taskforce, both for the public good and in order to get closer to the Illuminati. "He's playing by his own rules at this point," says DeMarle. "He's very much a double agent, pursuing two investigations simultaneously – fighting terrorism and going after the people behind all these plots."

Agent of change

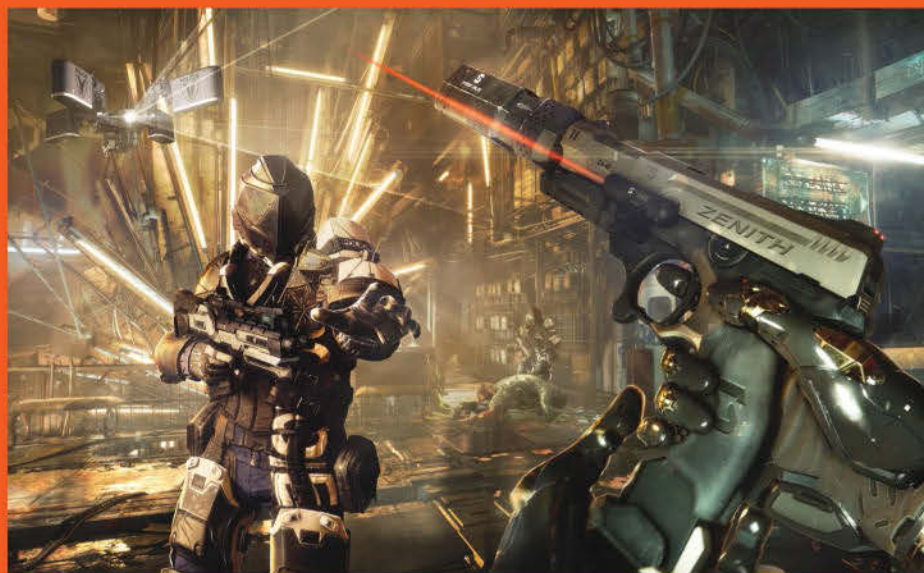
As an Interpol operative, Jensen naturally has access to formidable resources and license to enter regions that are otherwise off-limits, but as one of the organisation's few augmented troopers, his loyalties are divided. This becomes a source of increasing tension when Jensen runs into the Juggernaut Collective, a group of augmented hacktivists and freedom fighters who may be familiar to players of mobile spin-off *Deus Ex: The Fall*. As the campaign goes on, Jensen must choose whether to focus on keeping the peace or defending the rights of his fellow augmented.


You can carry out missions for both Interpol and the Collective – some of which feed into the main plot, while others change the chemistry of the world itself in unspecified but subtle ways. It sounds like a rigid faction split, but Eidos Montreal says you won't have to ally with one side throughout.



FEATURE

"Dude, what're you doing? I can see your laser poking out of the-" [squelch].





DEUS EX: MANKIND DIVIDED

GENERATION JUMP

HOW DOES MANKIND DIVIDED
MAKE USE OF THE XBOX
ONE'S MUSCLE?

The leap in visual and acoustic fidelity from *Human Revolution* to *Mankind Divided*'s overhauled Dawn Engine is dramatic. Environments are flooded with moving objects and light sources. Puddles offer up real-time reflections. Hair is made up of individual follicles that shift naturalistically. Lighting effects bleed together as you move around, casting shadows in several directions at once.

Parallax occlusion mapping creates 3D depth out of 'flat' textures. Objects can be damaged, though rarely destroyed. The audio is richer – where *HR* featured just three tracks for unaware, alerted and hostile AI states, the new score supports in excess of five layers per location that are procedurally remixed to create variety.

Eidos Montreal began work on the latest incarnation of its Dawn Engine before Xbox One's specs were announced, so creating an engine that scales down easily from ultra-potent development PCs was a priority. "We can just play with the little levers, like the amount of hair," comments Jonathan Jacques-Belletête, executive art director. "Like, if we wanted, we could put in as much as Pixar does – but then it wouldn't run on anything else."

Executive audio director Steve Szczepkowski says the potency of the new consoles has been bizarrely unhelpful, at times – it's easier to make hard-and-fast decisions when there are limited resources on hand: "It sucks but it forces your creativity. Almost like wringing an orange to the last drop – what else can I get out of it? Okay, that's it, it's a husk. But now it's like: 'What do we do? Let's do this! Or this!' And then after a month: 'Yeah, that's not working.'"

It's all about whether the needs of the moment outweigh the force of your ideals or your larger objectives – and the result, the developer hopes, is a game you'll want to replay several times over.

also kill or disable a foe from cover, rather than popping out to administer the *coup de grâce*, so ninja playthroughs feel a shade less like one type of game giving way awkwardly to another.

Metal age

The idea behind all of these tweaks, explains gameplay director Patrick Fortier, is to foster a more fluid and aggressive, but not necessarily more combative, kind of play. *Deus Ex* hasn't become an action game, whatever its frenetic reveal trailer may suggest: the balance of power between styles is as before, but the options are easier to get at, and the payoffs in terms of both cinematic impact and practical consequence more pronounced and satisfying.

The later stages of our demo are evidence of this. Having failed to win over a mission-critical NPC after a 'social boss encounter' – as in *Human Revolution*, these see you picking more or less heavy-handed responses in order to sway the target's opinion – Jensen is given 20 seconds to escape a chamber while enraged aug revolutionaries cut through the door. In a game like *Call of Duty* this sort of scenario



"DEUS EX HASN'T BECOME AN ACTION GAME, WHATEVER ITS FRENETIC TRAILER MAY SUGGEST"



"HUMAN REVOLUTION WAS KIND OF A ONE-OFF – WE WERE JUST THINKING ABOUT NOT FAILING"

would trigger a headlong rout amid showers of disintegrating screen furniture, but in *Mankind Divided* it's left to you to set the tempo.

You can always lock to cover and blast your way out, deploying the diamond skin Titan aug to shrug off bullets. But you might want to cloak instead, allowing the vengeful revolutionaries to pass by while you scour the room for leftover trinkets and intel. You could also avail yourself of a ceiling vent to get behind your attackers, toss a smoke grenade and use Jensen's visual implants to pick them off through the murk. Much will depend on which augmentations you've piled Praxis points into, but there's always room for improvisation regardless of gear.

Our demo handler opts to avoid contact entirely, equipping the new Icarus Dash aug for a precarious escape along ceiling girders, only to be lured in by the potential of an exploding barrel and kick off a raging battle in a hydroponics lab. It's as much a test of the world's reactivity as Jensen's wits – objects and surfaces deteriorate under fire, though not as comprehensively as in *Battlefield*, and a blast wave sends a pile of blue barrels cascading across the map.

"Not only is it about what the ability does – it's how quickly you can access it, and how intuitively it lends itself to a situation while you're getting shot at, how you respond when you're stressed," says Fortier of the revamped

line-up. "Is it mapped to the controller in such a way that you're not going to fumble it? Because we're a pretty controls-heavy game!"

Control freaks

He's especially enthused about the Icarus Dash, which compares to *Dishonored*'s Blink spell and the vampiric swooping of 2014's *Thief* reboot, Eidos Montreal's last release. "It lends itself to offence, but also to stealth as well, it's all about player style. It lends itself to creativity when you're setting yourself up to use another aug, to reposition or in order to create an opening. It's very versatile."

Mankind Divided's layouts put more emphasis on verticality than those of *Human Revolution*, so investing in the Icarus Dash aug early on is advisable if you're to visit out-of-the-way nooks in search of PDAs that contain map insights and bits of backstory. One such chamber in Golem City is home, for reasons not given, to penguins. DeMarle won't tell us whether these are augmented penguins, but it's probably worth checking them out regardless.

If Golem City shows the world of *Deus Ex* at its most compromised and uneven, another location, the blue-veined glass-on-concrete Borg cube of Palisade Bank, is *Deus Ex* at its most sterile and subjugated. Eidos Montreal refrains from taking us on a tour, but drops a few hints about the

//

MANAGEMENT SHIFT

HOW EIDOS IS IMPROVING
DEUS EX'S BOSS BATTLES

Human Revolution's least rewarding elements were its boss fights – sluggish against foes with unnaturally ample health bars, and a source of intense frustration for players who'd stocked up on non-combat augs. It was no huge surprise to discover that these were the work of an outside studio. For *Mankind Divided*, Eidos Montreal is firmly in charge.

"It's all about supporting all the different play aspects," says gameplay director Patrick Fortier. "That was the main thing that was missing from the boss fights. Thematically, I think they were interesting, but certain players found a challenge there that wasn't really catered to them." *Mankind Divided*'s bosses are better balanced. "There are ways to stealth them, there are ways to beat them in combat and there are conversations you can have that maybe give you a different means of dealing with the situation altogether."

"You can also decide to do it lethally or not," adds narrative director Mary DeMarle. "For *Human Revolution*, because of the way we designed it, [the bosses] always died in the cutscenes. You had no choice. But we rectified that in the *Missing Link* DLC, and we've rectified it in this game." If it's a 'social boss fight', otherwise known as a heated chat, it may even be worth 'losing' to see how the conversation affects the progress of the narrative.



DEUS EX: MANKIND DIVIDED



Human Revolution's art direction made up for middling graphics tech. This game shines on both counts.



building's contents. "It's not a bank you and I would go into to withdraw cash," says executive audio director Steve Szczepkowski. "It's a bank for the biggest corporations in the world – almost our equivalent of the famous Swiss banks – where big corporations can store their data."

The theme here is 'corporate feudalism', the art department's catch-all term for despotism carried out at boardroom level. "It's the opposite of the cyber-renaissance theme," says art director Martin Debeau. "Everything is based on the idea of a castle. Super-straight, no curves. We wanted to create the effect of a huge safe. There's no emotion to that map; it's purely about reason. Everything has a purpose; everything is function. The challenge was to do something that looks interesting without putting emotion into it, and I think we've touched on something there, but it's definitely the place in the game where we are at the far end of the spectrum."

Augmented reality

Eidos Montreal is in it for the long haul with *Deus Ex*. The studio has expanded considerably over the past few years, adding more than 100 people to its team and also an in-house motion capture facility. Besides *Mankind Divided*, it has at least one secret project on the boil and is helping Crystal Dynamics out with

development of Xbox One timed exclusive *Rise of the Tomb Raider*.

Things haven't always seemed as rosy as they do currently, however. The developer's *Thief* reboot took half a decade to develop, thanks allegedly to internal politics, and received muted praise from reviewers – although it went on to achieve "favorable" sales and contributed to an upwardly revised Square Enix profit forecast later in 2014. Co-founder Stephane D'Astous left under a cloud in July 2013, accusing the parent publisher of a lack of "courage" and "leadership".

Thankfully for all concerned, *Mankind Divided* is expressive of a team at the height of its powers, offering up a world of sparkling thematic density and coherence, tied to a smart if cautious revision of the mechanisms of battle and infiltration. It needs to make a strong impression – this is the first in a series of projects set in the *Deus Ex* universe, as Square Enix moves to capitalize on the unexpected but welcome success of *Human Revolution*.

"*Human Revolution* was kind of a one-off," notes Szczepkowski. "We were just thinking about not failing. We were trying to revive this franchise and hoped that we would do something good. But now the mandate's changed – we have a much wider scope to consider when we try something. How does it fit in?" ■

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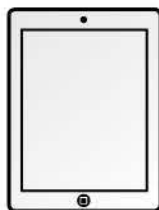
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REVIEWS

The most important Xbox releases rated



BATMAN: ARKHAM KNIGHT

Farewell, our fave animal impersonator (p68)

THIS MONTH IN FACTS

FOUR FAMILIES NOT
TO RECREATE IN
MASSIVE CHALICE

LANNISTER: 'Incest' is not
a recognized stat value

KARDASHIAN: Too many Ks

BLUTH: No banana stand here

YOUR OWN: The engine can't
handle the dysfunction

SUPERHERO IDENTITIES
TEAM OXM DEFINITELY
DON'T ADOPT BY NIGHT

MATTHEW: The Boss, wielder
of P45s/terror of Bath

ALEX: Retro Man, saving
the world, but only in 2D

TOM: Dr Mean Scores, the
defiler of Metacritic

EMMA: Punctuation Girl,
scourge of bad apostrophes

FRANCHISE FACE-OFF

	Arkham Knight	Massive Chalice
Capes	1	0
Families	0	Many
Money	Billions	Get mating

THIS MONTH WE...



Kicked some butt p72



Didn't miss Master Chief p74



Did the horizontal tango p78



Weren't great at diplomacy p80



Threw a teenage tantrum p81

REVIEW

We dress as Batman for Halloween. And Easter. And Christmas. And on weekends. Any opportunity we get, really.





PUBLISHER WARNER BROS. / **DEVELOPER** ROCKSTEADY STUDIOS
FORMAT XBOX ONE / **RELEASE DATE** OUT NOW

BATMAN: ARKHAM KNIGHT

What if The Dark Knight Rises was (gasp) *fun*?

Goodbyes are meant to be sad. Tearful farewells that leave you feeling down. They shouldn't be celebratory. They shouldn't feel this action-packed, tense and exhilarating. They shouldn't make us laugh one moment, gasp the next. The rules are clear. Trust Rocksteady, not content with turning one of gaming's biggest jokes into one of its strongest icons, to smash those rules one last time.

Where better to say goodbye than the city we've wanted to explore since the start? Gotham is a major technical achievement. Five times the size of that in *Arkham City*, it's still far from Xbox's biggest sandbox, but makes up for it in personality, in fan-delighting touches and locales. Grapple to the tallest building then glide over it all – after a week of play it's still our favorite way to take in the magnificence of Batman's home. Concerns that going truly open-world would dilute Rocksteady's insane attention to detail are unfounded: this is a magnificent-looking game.

Sacrifices had to be made for that level of detail, with a mass evacuation explaining the lack of non-criminal NPCs. Initially disappointed by its empty streets, we let side missions rack up and were soon spit-taking humble pie. Bank robberies, drone attacks, mysterious murders, police chases – left to its own devices, Gotham is soon crammed with enough crims to fill Blackgate Penitentiary a hundred times over. No wonder Bruce never takes a night off; 30 hours in and we still haven't tracked down all of Gotham's most wanted, or come close to seeing everything.

Likewise, combat goes out with more of a pow than a whimper, its free-flow combat benefitting from contextual KOs and better gadget use. Really, it's the number of on-screen enemies that keep bouts fresh. Far bigger than *City* or *Asylum* ever dreamed of, these swarms of goons force Batman to use both brain and brawn (emphasis on brawn). As soon as fist leaves face, you're planning the next three punches.

You're using new throw counters to clear the crowd, so you can prioritize armed thugs or the new medic class before they undo all of your (literally) back-breaking work.

The new assisted battles are rarer, but always a joy. Double-team takedowns have you flicking between Batman and the other member of your dynamic duo seamlessly, never stopping for a second and leading to some of the game's most spectacular fistfights. Dual combat is so good, we almost wish the whole game had been built around it.

But then one of *Arkham*'s pleasures has always been playing one man taking on an army and winning. Okay, it's one man and a belt of tricks, but you can't begrudge this particular equipment (tellingly, *Origins*' additions are missing, but not missed). You can

now hack drones to turn them against assailants, mimic voices to lead guards to lonely corners of the map and pull off glorious multi-man takedowns, removing five enemies from the equation in as many seconds. The Dark Knight isn't finishing this trilogy a broken-backed moper: this is a hero at the height of his powers.

Just as you're starting to feel a bit overpowered, old tactics start blowing up in your face. After years of crawling



REVIEWER

TOM STONE

Live OXM Tom Stone
@TheTomStrange

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?

The conclusion of Rocksteady's *Arkham* series, bigger than ever for Xbox One.

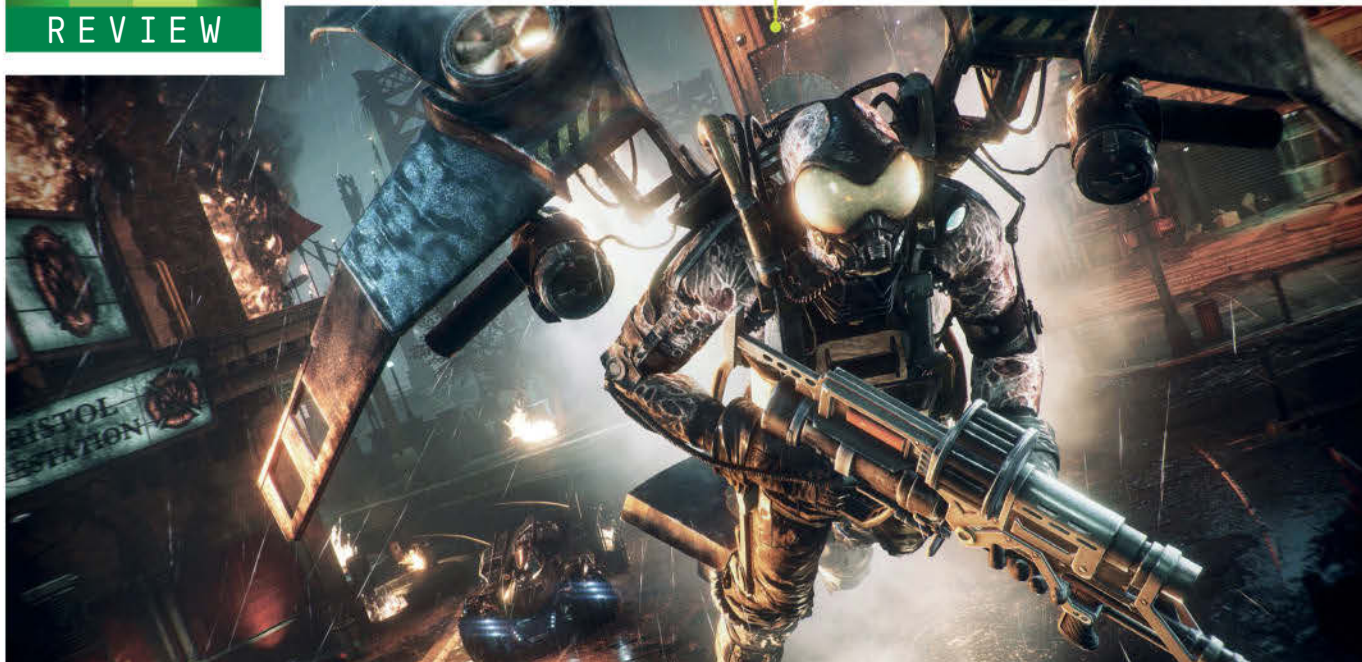
WHAT'S IT LIKE?

Finally playing the Batman game Rocksteady always wanted to make.

WHO'S IT FOR?

People who like Batman. Wait, there are people who *don't* like Batman?

Firefly side missions make for some great Batmobile-ejected takedowns.



through floor grates, henchmen start nuking vents with flames. One burnt Bat later, we switched to aerial vantage points, only to find once-safe territory plastered in mines and the guards below ordered to move in pairs, leaving you no clear angle of attack. In the Arkham Knight you're facing a foe who knows Batman's moves – one who punishes over-reliance on any lone technique and forces you to shake up your playstyle. That's where the sense of scale really pays off. Huge environments mean it's easier for you to be spotted, but also give you more options – and you'll have to exploit most of them if you want any chance of defeating a smarter enemy than before.

At the other end of the subtlety spectrum is the Batmobile. Not quite a car, nor a tank, but some ingenious

hybrid – a vehicle capable of jetting through the city one moment, then carefully slipping around corners the next. Get the Batmobile up to full speed and it laughs at the size of Gotham's map. Fast travel? That's always been a lie, a fancy word for 'teleport'. This is fast travel. It feels like driving a paradox: all the toughness and weight of a bulldozer, but with the speed of a Ferrari and acceleration of a shotgun blast. Six years after we endured the fetch-item-from-the-boot 'action' of *Arkham Asylum*, we're finally in control of the greatest Bat-gadget of them all, and it doesn't disappoint.

Bat's entertainment

But driving through Gotham was never the concern. It's that cannon on top of Bats' motor that had us worried.

Is Ivy Bats' silliest nemesis? There's stiff competition.

Common battles have you surrounded by several drones, in furious shoot-outs that are a literal blast and not as far from Batman's fighting strategy as many might think. Go in all guns blazing and the drones will finish you off in seconds. You have to play smart, picking enemies off gradually, constantly keeping track of who's your biggest threat and who's your next target. Sound familiar? It may never feel quite 'Batman' enough to be a completely natural evolution, but it's a fun part of the package. One that, a few overlong battles excepted, makes for a welcome change of pace.

Less successful are missions where you have to sneak behind tanks in the World's Loudest Stealth Vehicle, a misjudged idea that frustrates where it should exhilarate. But then 20 minutes later you're in a thundering chase sequence and all is well. Smashing lesser vehicles – and lesser walls, benches and concrete pillars – aside is a little more *Burnout Begins* than some may like, but who cares when we're the closest we've ever come to playing the car chase from *The Dark Knight*? It's bound to be divisive, but to us, the Batmobile feels like the final part of Batman's arsenal, neatly rounding out the set.



Riiiiiiiiidder racer!

The Riddler has never been better: his determination to be seen as Batman's ultimate nemesis might be our favorite of the side missions. His driving challenges below the city, solving an ever-changing racecourse as he brags about his superior intellect, are some of the highlights of the game.

Was the world praying for a religious superhero? Great headgear, mind.



REVIEW



"Batmobile aside, innovation has taken a back seat to mastery"

How fitting it should arrive for the completion of his story. With few fresh villains left to introduce, Rocksteady wisely focuses on the man behind the mask. Driven by his guilt after the events of *Arkham City*, he lies to allies, makes rash decisions and refuses help in even the most dire of situations. He's a more flawed anti-hero than we got to see before and far more compelling for it. If the story has flaws, it's not in ambition – just to be as irritating and vague as possible, we'll say that many spoiler-stuffed ideas towards the end

are strong contenders for our gaming moments of the year.

One disappointment, however, is the Arkham Knight himself. Built up as Batman's greatest nemesis yet, he's too whiny for our tastes. His dull personality makes it difficult to understand or care about his motivations for wanting the Bat dead. What's more, his secret identity is one of the game's least compelling mysteries. But what chance did he stand? He has to share screen time with The Scarecrow, ridiculously absent since *Arkham Asylum*, who

Lesser cars have no place near the Batmobile.

makes for an excellent co-lead villain here. Many big bads short-changed by previous *Arkham* games get meaty subplots of their own here, in improved side quests that often rival the main campaign. Revealing which foes return would rightfully earn us a life sentence in the Asylum, but Rocksteady has chosen well, with everyone at the top of their game for Bats' big send-off.

Because make no mistake: this is goodbye. Batmobile aside, innovation has taken a back seat to mastery. *Arkham Knight* isn't perfect, but we defy anyone to battle a crowd of thugs, leap into the Batmobile, burn through Gotham, then launch themselves into the sky and glide over the city – all without a single break in the action – and not feel like the superhero that gaming needed. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

PROS/CONS

✓ The Batmobile is a blast
✓ Assisted takedowns are spectacular
✓ A real visual powerhouse

✗ Batmobile stealth sections? Pass
✗ Some 'detective work' mini-games are a little dumb
✗ A little similar to the previous games

THE BEST BIT



Will we ever tire of firing Batman out of the Batmobile and then gliding over Gotham? No.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

?

This is Rocksteady's last *Batman* game. After this outstanding trilogy, we can't wait to see what it comes up with now.

OVERALL

It's the realization of a vision Rocksteady has been working towards since 2009. Now that gaming tech has finally caught up, we've been given the swansong the Dark Knight deserves.

9

Aganos towers above all the other characters in the game.

REVIEW



PUBLISHER MICROSOFT STUDIOS / DEVELOPER IRON GALAXY STUDIOS / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW



REVIEWER
ANDI HAMILTON
Live andihero
@andihero

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?

The second batch of content for the resurrected fighting game.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

A fast-paced beat-'em-up with an emphasis on combos.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Anyone with even the slightest interest in beat-'em-ups.

KILLER INSTINCT: SEASON 2

Xbox One's premier fighting game continues to grow

At last! The final character has been released and the second 'season' of Xbox One's headline fighting game has been brought to a close. It's been a pretty good year for *Killer Instinct*, despite a rocky start with *Season 1* developer Double Helix Games leaving the series to make something for Amazon and being replaced by Iron Galaxy, which was best known for porting other games. Turns out, it's actually pretty damn good at making its own, too. *Season 2*'s new characters make for one of the most interesting lineups of all the current fighting games and, thanks to a big injection of prize money from Iron Galaxy, *Killer Instinct* is one of the featured games at EVO 2015 – the world's biggest fighting-game tournament. Not a bad year at all.

Iron Galaxy brought with it a fair raft of changes, almost all of them positive.

It cleaned up the look of the game, and added some much sleeker menus and a proper single-player story mode. Both welcome inclusions, but any fight fan worth their salt knows that these are simply nice extras. Trimmings.

The characters are the real meat of the game. Released at a rate of almost one per month since *Season 2* launched, they're a mix of old and new combatants. Four originals – boxer TJ Combo, the Amazonian Maya, dinosaur Riptor (who's been given a cybernetic makeover) and literal burning man Cinder – return from previous games, with their original movesets being tweaked to fit the core combo system that provides the backbone for this installment.

The newcomers, however, are far more interesting – just listen to these basic descriptions. Kan-Ra is essentially a mummy that can use

sand to set up traps and then whip away with his bandages. Aganos is a giant living pile of rubble that can set up walls to bounce his opponents off for huge air-combo opportunities. Hisako moves extremely slowly until she attacks suddenly, much like the movement of the ghosts in one of the thousands of Japanese horror movies her design has been influenced by. Omen is a being of pure energy who can shift form as he fights, while new final boss ARIA is essentially three characters in one. They're not just different fighting styles – some require almost totally different approaches to how you play the game.

It's been really interesting to see how the game has changed as each new character has been dropped into it, but now you've got the entire roster at your disposal, you've got a very different game to what Iron Galaxy was left with at the end of *Season 1*. For instance, Sabrewulf is a really effective pressure fighter who is at his most deadly when he is right up in his opponent's face. He has moves that can slide under projectiles and avoid ground strikes that allow him to get 'in' on anyone. Kan-Ra, however, is his kryptonite. Any Sabrewulf player is going to have to substantially rethink their approach when confronted with



Stage Ultras

As well as putting the exclamation point on your victory with an Ultra Combo, you now have the option of a 'Stage Ultra'. They're nowhere near as grim as the stuff in *Mortal Kombat*, but it is still pretty cool to have your bested opponent turned to dust or dragged into the underworld by disembodied hands.

Big words coming from the person spinning two huge knives around their head.



REVIEW



Story mode features some stat screens, giving some detail to the bizarre backstory.



"Shadows mode is almost certainly set to be *Killer Instinct*'s legacy"

this new matchup. Kan-Ra, on the other hand, finds himself in deep trouble when pitted against original *Killer Instinct* fighter Jago, who can pressure him with fireballs and avoid a lot of his traps with ease. No new character has been added simply because they fill some kind of fighting-game archetype – they all add depth to the game, and the fact that they're all so well balanced is a credit to Iron Galaxy's eye for a fighting game.

Shadow warriors

Killer Instinct borrowed the 'free-to-play with character rotation' concept from the ultra-successful MOBA *League of Legends*, but Iron Galaxy has also co-opted a few other things from other genres for *Season 2*. First

of all, there are the new Ranked Leagues in multiplayer mode. Similar to *FIFA*'s Online Seasons mode, you play a series of matches against other opponents, earning points for a win. Cross a certain threshold and you'll be promoted into the next 'division', facing stiffer competition from better players. Drop below a threshold after you finish the series of matches and you'll be relegated. It adds a feeling of importance to every online battle, rather than just competing to reach a higher points total than other players.

The finest new addition is Shadows mode. Again, this is something seen in other games – such as *Forza*'s Drivatars – where data based on your play style is used to create an AI opponent for you or your buddies to play against.

TJ Combo begins to understand the 'point' of Hisako's naginata.

Here in *Killer Instinct*, your fight data is stored not only for yourself, but asynchronously with other players, so they can tackle the most up-to-date version of your shadow whenever they fancy. These are alarmingly complex clones, with reports of some Shadow fighters even learning some of their masters' more obnoxious habits – taunting after winning a round and, in the case of one player, 'teabagging' his latest victim. This mode is almost certainly set to be *Killer Instinct*'s legacy – a feature that should be 'borrowed' by anyone else planning on making a fighting game in the future.

Killer Instinct: Season 2 has seen what was the solid base of a fighting game realize its potential. Iron Galaxy has come onboard and made the game its own. More than Double Helix. Hell, even more than Rare itself. The free-to-play model is still a good way to get into the game, but with all the extra content on offer, *Killer Instinct* is now a fighting game worth investing in. Roll on *Season 3*. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

COOLEST CHARACTER



HISAKO
A naginata-wielding onryō, which means 'vengeful ghost', who glitches around the stages like she's been ripped from a VHS tape of *Ringu*.



PRO TIP

Killer Instinct has one of the most informative and versatile training modes of all fighting games. Use it.

DID YOU KNOW?

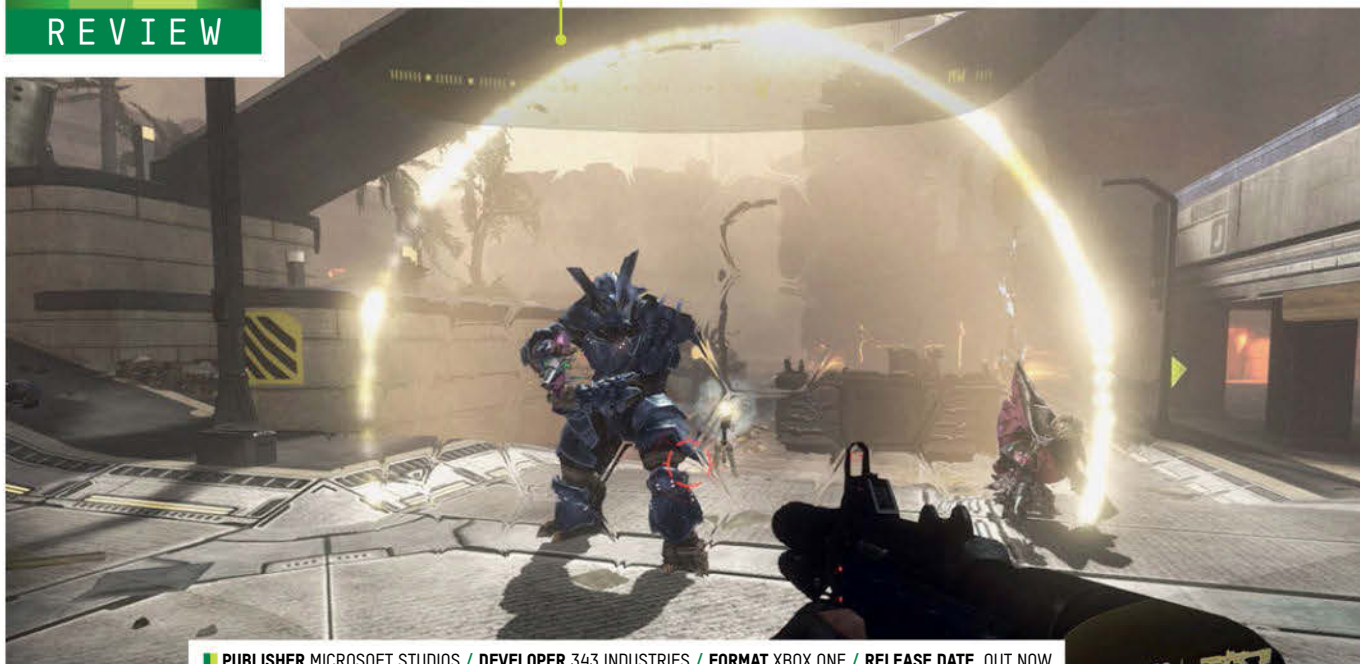
Iron Galaxy is responsible for porting some truly great fighting games to Xbox 360 – *Marvel vs Capcom Origins*, *Darkstalkers* and *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*.

OVERALL

Killer Instinct is a game that has grown exponentially from where it was at the end of *Season 1*. It's now a fully featured, deep beat-'em-up that's an essential buy for any Xbox fight fan.

8

You can't drop bubble shields of your own – but you can make use of ones dropped by enemies. Ha!



PUBLISHER MICROSOFT STUDIOS / DEVELOPER 343 INDUSTRIES / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW



REVIEWER

ALEX DALE

Live ChocoboOfDoom
@SporadicDaler

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?

Halo does noir, mixing traditional action with brooding moments of repose.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

A refreshing change of pace, both to the narrative and the action.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Halo fans burned out by Master Chief's (excellent) one-note antics.

HALO 3: ODST

Conclusive proof that too many Chiefs spoil the broth

Famously, if you scoured the streets of New Mombasa long enough in the Xbox 360 version of *Halo 3: ODST*, you'd happen upon a poster of the planet Earth with the ominous headline 'Destiny Awaits'. As veiled references go, this one was as subtle as a Gravity Hammer to the face, and a sign that Bungie had one eye firmly on the future back in 2009.

If Bungie was caught future-gazing during *ODST*'s development, then you couldn't really begrudge it. The studio had recently secured its independence from Microsoft, and it's rumored it wanted to step off the *Halo* treadmill and flex its creative muscles on new projects. Six years on, the *Destiny* reference may have been removed from this HD remaster, but the legacy of Bungie's internal conflict remains in *ODST*'s fragmented and fascinating

design. This is a dark, brooding and delightfully experimental prequel, that is simultaneously unlike any *Halo* game that came before it and something of a greatest-hits package.

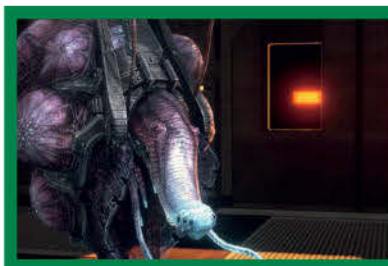
Your first hint that *ODST* is a little different to the rest of *The Master Chief Collection* (which it supplements as DLC – and is free for those who played online before 19 December) is, um, the complete lack of any Master Chief whatsoever. At the time, Microsoft likely had kittens at the prospect of marketing a *Halo* game without the Chief's ultra-marketable orange face, but the decision to steer the narrative away from the iconic, overpowered Spartan offers a golden opportunity to humanize the series' sci-fi universe; a glimpse into the heroics that surround the hero, if you like.

The bulk of the story is told through the visor of the Rookie – a junior Orbital

Drop Shock Trooper who regains consciousness six hours after the descent. It soon become apparent that things have gone a bit wrong; it's the black of night, his teammates are nowhere to be found and all is still and calm. Your task is to scour this grimy urban hub world for artifacts that provide hints to your team's fate – a bent sniper rifle, perhaps, or a panel from a detonating device.

The pacing of these sections is a radical departure from the manic energy of the mainline *Halo* series. With the fighting already done and dusted, the night provides few threats to the Rookie's livelihood; just the occasional patrol roaming the streets, hoping to soak up any straggling survivors. While there's some scope for exploration – audio logs add flesh to the plot's bones – these sections are mostly straight A-to-B trawls that seek to challenge the senses more than the trigger finger.

And what an assault on the senses *ODST*'s New Mombasa is to players weaned on the brightly lit, curvy exotic alien worlds of previous *Halos*. An angular, functional sprawl of skyscrapers illuminated only by the flicker of electronic lights, the abandoned city is almost aggressively anti-*Halo* in appearance – and maybe that was Bungie's intention.



Squid's in

The Engineers' addition to the cast is a treat for hardcore fans. The squid-looking blobs were famously cut so late in the development of the original *Halo* that they appeared in official guides. But they were hardly worth the wait – all they do is float around, shielding the other enemies.

ODST's final level, Coastal Highway, is a disappointingly linear scramble to escape from New Mombasa, but the dramatic final stand-off saves the day.



REVIEW



We never did bother to find out what the difference is with these red plasma rifles.



"This is unlike any *Halo* before it, yet also a greatest-hits package"

But yet, the game's rebellious streak stops dead in its tracks the moment you happen upon one of the clues. This triggers a flashback that shows how the events unfolded earlier in the day, and these play out in the form of a self-contained, very traditional *Halo* mission.

If you've come here in the hope of new toys for the *Halo* sandbox, you'll leave disappointed. *ODST*'s roots as a *Halo 3* expansion show most keenly here; the weapon lineup and balance is the same, and the only new enemy type on display, the Engineer, is a disappointment. But *ODST* doesn't merely tread over familiar ground – it strides over it with the confident air of a game that's completely in harmony with its mechanics. Levels are shorter

than traditional *Halo* fare, and are more focused – delivering set-pieces that rank up there with the best in the series, including, most memorably, a last stand on a flimsy bridge against a fleet of Banshees. The only blot on *ODST*'s copybook is the rather directionless penultimate level – a meandering slog through a succession of grunt-packed tunnels.

The challenges might be familiar to *Halo* veterans, but they demand a different set of tactics, as the humans lack the health-regen abilities of the Master Chief. With health packs few and far between, caution is the watch word, and you begin to view old enemies in new ways. Grunts, mere cannon-fodder for John-117, become a viable threat for the first time

For all its brooding narrative, *ODST* is at its most interesting when it drops you into the thick of the action.

in the series when your shields are down. This can, however, lead to the checkpointing system placing you in sticky situations when your health bar is low, and it's a problem 343 Industries hasn't managed to fix with a second bite of the cherry.

That aside, this is a faithful remaster that might be unnecessary from a technical standpoint (the Xbox 360 version is still very easy on the eye), but is absolutely essential in respect to shining a spotlight back onto a game that was misunderstood and underappreciated upon its original release. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see that *Halo 3: ODST* is very much a product of its upbringing – with one eye on refining *Halo*'s past and the other on redefining *Halo*'s future. It delivers the same action as the rest of *The Master Chief Collection*, but in a subtly different way – and that means this most misshapen entry in the *Halo* series ends up rounding out the *Collection* nicely. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

PROS/CONS

- ✓ Slick remaster of an already gorgeous game
- ✓ Expertly paced, with some truly great moments
- ✓ Great price
- ✗ Loss of the Firefight multiplayer
- ✗ Slightly too many vehicle-based missions
- ✗ A few annoying AI bugs

THE BEST BIT



The noise the Carbine rifle makes when you zoom in. Like an elephant playing the tuba.

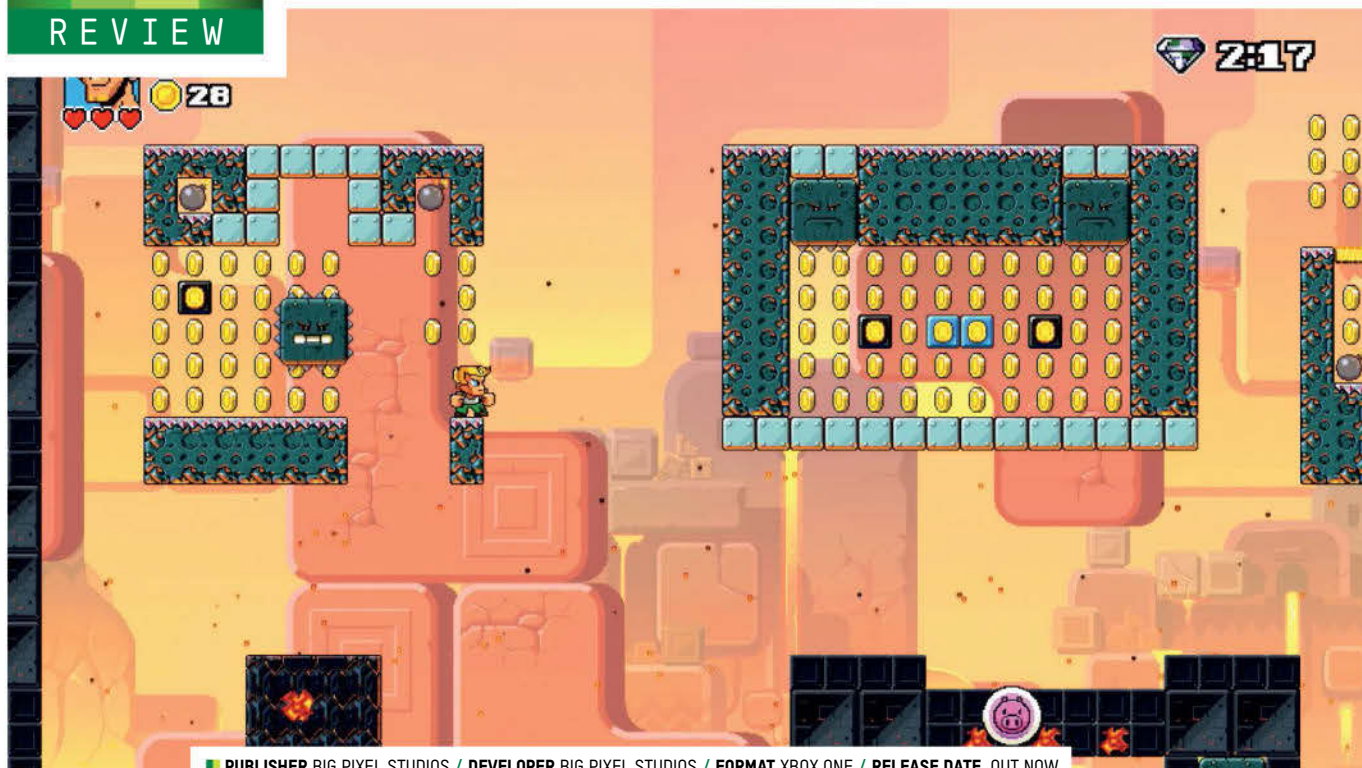
COMPLETION CLOCK



OVERALL

Who knew that what *The Master Chief Collection* actually needed was less Master Chief? This short but sweet single-player offering adds a new flavor to the already meaty offering.

8



PUBLISHER BIG PIXEL STUDIOS / DEVELOPER BIG PIXEL STUDIOS / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW



REVIEWER

ALEX DALE

Live ChocoboOfDoom
@SporadicDaler

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?

Coin-gobbling platformer with ever-changing layouts and a sinister grinning pig.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

Begins slow and boring, but as you power up, things escalate quickly.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Retro fans, obviously, but also anyone who lives for replaying games until they master them.

MEGA COIN SQUAD

Coin affrays, to coin a phrase

Mega Coin Squad, you must understand, isn't a difficult game. Instead, it's a game you choose to make difficult for yourself.

On paper, the task is simple. Collect a set number of coins, deposit them into a giant grinning piggybank in the middle of the arena, and then move on to the next stage. Platform layouts constantly change and the native wildlife are out for blood, but there are safety nets that hypothetically make your job a doddle. There's no time limit, you have three lives and you can 'bank' your coins in the porcelain porcine. If you take it slow and steady, *Mega Coin Squad* is a walkover.

But this isn't in the spirit the game is intended. The meta goal is to burn

through its 16 stages as quickly as possible – at time of writing, the record stands at an impressive 16 minutes. If you want to even get a whiff of the leaderboard, you're going to have to kick those safety nets out and challenge yourself to complete each stage without dying, to a strict time limit, without banking your coins. It's the only way you can husk each stage of its three gems, which translate to weapon, stats and ability upgrades.

Speedrunning completely changes the complexion of the game for the better. Played at a leisurely pace, it's a charming but awkward platformer. At speed, and with a suitably beefed-up character, the various mechanics crystallize to form a tense, pulsating and extremely aggressive-minded

platformer. Once you find your feet you barely use them again, tearing around the arena like a banshee, drilling through obstacles with fiery dash-strikes and terrorizing enemies that you once avoided, just to squeeze out a few extra coins.

It barely lasts an hour if your only ambition is to see the end credits, but if you like getting your nails dirty by digging deep into a game's systems – endlessly experimenting and strategizing with an ever-expanding moveset to shave a tiny slither of time from your next runthrough, then you'll find *Mega Coin Squad* endlessly rewarding. For a game that conjures up its level design on the fly, it's an exceptionally well-sculpted speedrunning game. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

COOLEST CHARACTER



ROBOT UNICORN

Stats aside, the playable characters are much of a muchness. So why not pick the robot unicorn?

PRO TIP



Air-dash hard, and air-dash often. Few things can hurt you while you're dashing.

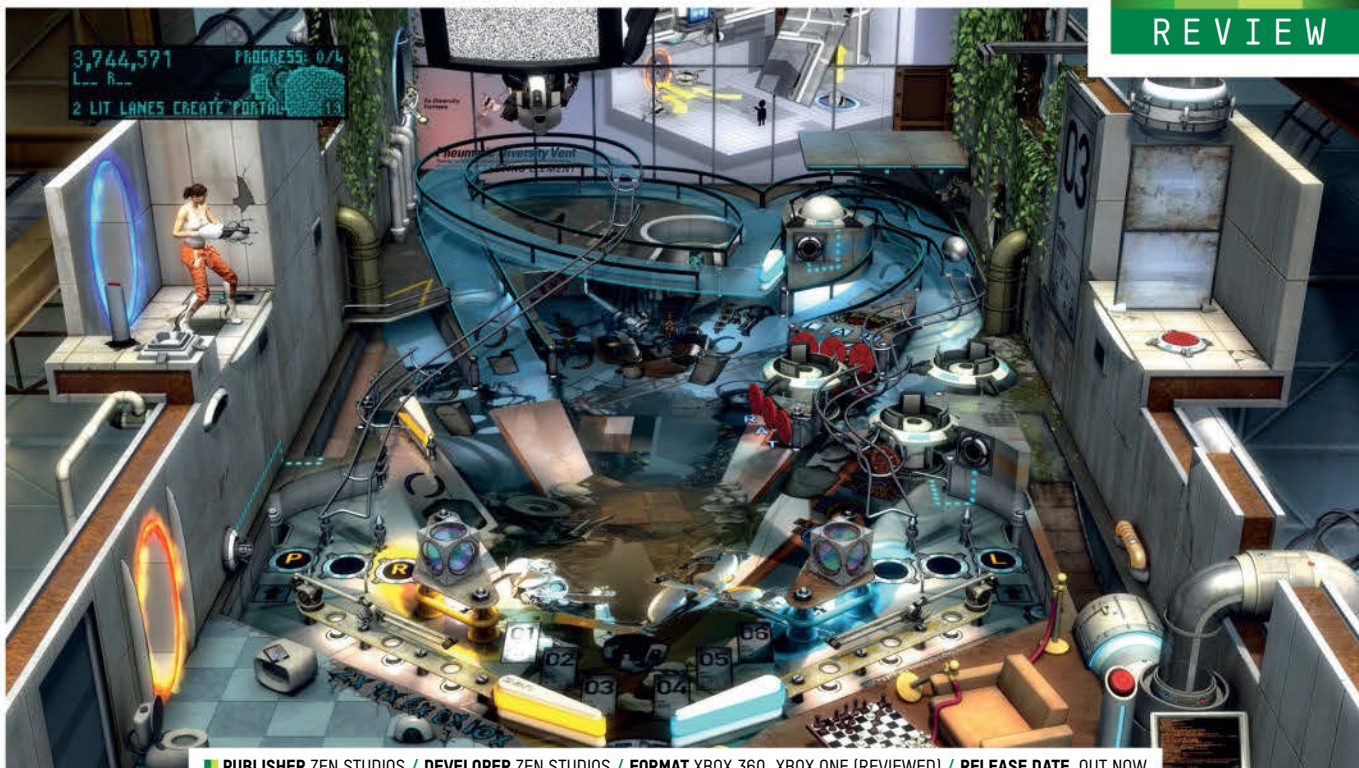
DID YOU KNOW?

Big Pixel Studios made its name developing mobile games. Match-three puzzler *Piyo Blocks 2* is its biggest hit.

OVERALL

In 60 minutes, this will change you from a tentative muppet to an all-round offensive terror. A terrifically balanced platformer that'll coax out the perfectionist speedrunner in us all.

8



PUBLISHER ZEN STUDIOS / DEVELOPER ZEN STUDIOS / FORMAT XBOX 360, XBOX ONE (REVIEWED) / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW



REVIEWER

JUSTIN TOWELL

Live CatGoneCrazy
@CatGoneCrazy

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?

A *Portal*-themed premium downloadable table for *Pinball FX 2*.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

A real pinball table, only the ball occasionally warps elsewhere.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Portal fans. Everyone else will find better pinball tables elsewhere.

PINBALL FX 2: PORTAL

"I'm going to kill you. And all the cake is gone"

Speedy thing goes in, speedy thing comes out," explains GLaDOS. That's portals for ya. But don't assume you'll need to be 'thinking with portals' while you're playing this. This isn't portal-based pinball; this is a *Portal*-themed pinball table. Yes, you're right, that is less exciting.

Not that it should really come as a surprise. Zen Studios' previous themed tables all have their physics and design grounded in the real world and that formula is working nicely. Thankfully, the action here isn't completely grounded in realism. There are a few portals you can interact with, though. The one at the top of the table can be disorientating as your ball is suddenly somewhere else, but it never varies,

so you can anticipate its reappearance and hit a skillshot, which feels great. These little details and challenges are everywhere and it's rewarding to learn them, especially seeing as success is met with the voice of Steve Merchant.

Indeed, the source material is duly plundered for its best bits. There are plenty of voice clips from the games, with GLaDOS and Wheatley nattering away. Atlas and P-Body also make an appearance in one of the game's best moments: a multiball bonus section, complete with absurdly upbeat music.

The table's evolution is pleasantly complex, with themed tests selectable in any order you like, eventually concluding with a battle against GLaDOS herself. There's a good pace of discovery as you work things out, and

the opportunities for skill shots mean there's huge scope for combos as tasty as anything in *Street Fighter*.

Even so, this certainly isn't the best *FX2* table. It looks rather drab and cluttered thanks to *Portal 2*'s theme of dereliction, and it doesn't feel particularly varied. The ball's movement is beautifully solid, but it can feel too leaden. You can change the tilt of the table to speed it up, but your scores won't count any more... and high-score chasing is the entire point of the game.

For the comparatively tiny price, even if you don't like *Portal*, this is still a solid pinball table with some funny voice clips. If you are a fan, you'll enjoy it... but it'll probably just make you want to play *Portal* again. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

PROS/CONS

- ✓ Authentic licensed voice clips and 3D models
- ✓ Excellent learning curve keeps giving
- ✓ Multiball mode is joyous

- ✗ Portal mechanic is essentially cosmetic
- ✗ Table feels a bit too small
- ✗ Looks and sounds a little drab

PRO TIP



You can use the left stick to tilt the table and avoid going between the flippers.

DID YOU KNOW?

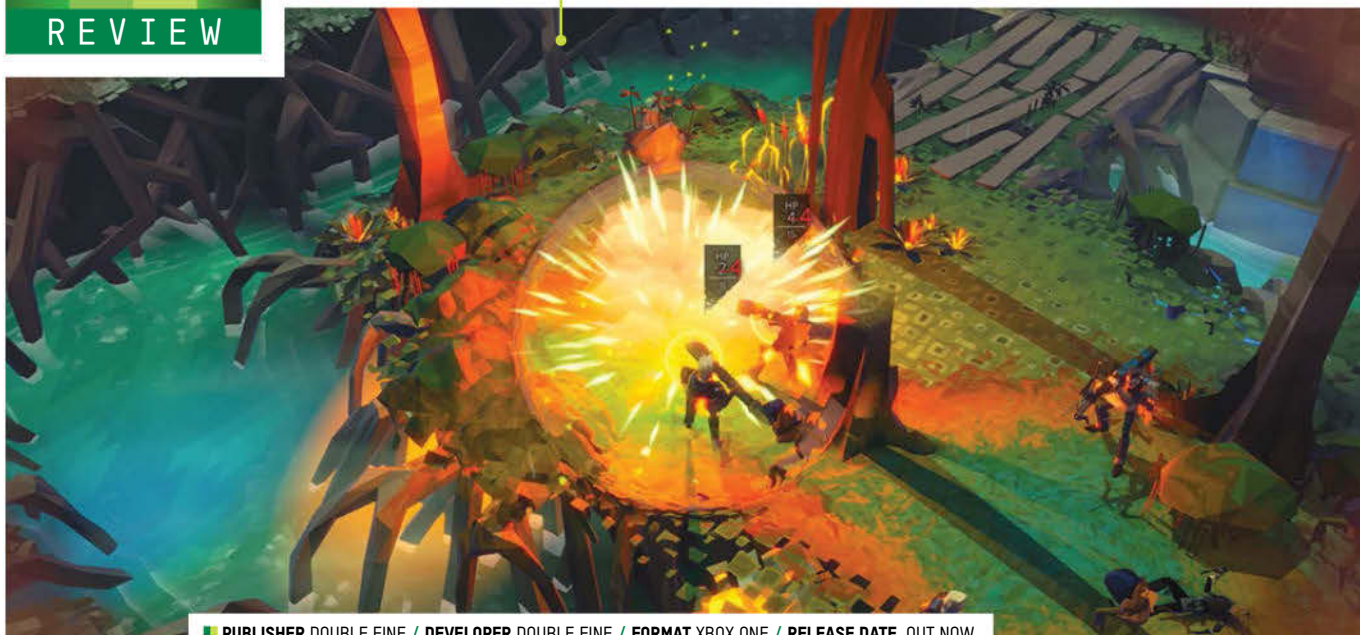
? *Portal 2* is supposed to take place 50,000 years after the original *Portal*. Isn't stasis an amazing invention?

OVERALL

The portals themselves are downplayed in favor of traditional pinball action, which is slick but unremarkable. Even so, it's made more entertaining thanks to *Portal* soundbites.

6

Levels are procedurally generated, but environments standardize play – forests always offer lots of cover, for example.



PUBLISHER DOUBLE FINE / DEVELOPER DOUBLE FINE / FORMAT XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW



REVIEWER
JOE SKREBELS

Live OXM Joe
@2plus2isjoe

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?

A squad strategy game with a three-century-long twist.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

XCOM and the appendix to a *Song and Ice and Fire* book.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Curious strategy fans (and frustrated evil Nazi types, we guess).

MASSIVE CHALICE

Sex! Now we have your attention, here's a game about sex

Nikola Tesla was an amazing human being – he helped forge the modern world, and David Bowie played him badly in a movie – but to like him, you kind of have to accept the fact that he believed in eugenics. His idea that humanity should be selectively bred based on perceived strong traits, forcibly sterilizing those deemed unfit to procreate is... unfashionable. This isn't the paper-thin intro metaphor it seems. *Massive Chalice* relies on eugenics – builds itself around them, even. The game's make-up forces you to, at a base level, write the design document for humanity.

The setup is a mixture of the familiar and the charmingly absurd. Your kingdom is under attack and you, an immortal being with some kind of connection to the titular Chalice (which for no reason narrates the game in two bickering voices), have to survive for 300 years until said vessel can

charge up enough power to blow up all evil with magic. To do this, you play a combination management-strategy game that could be called a blood relative of *XCOM* – if that term meant someone who had pushed someone else into a corner, stuck a needle in their arm and stolen all their blood.

Your base is a multi-region kingdom where you can build Keeps that spawn warriors, Crucibles that offer them more experience or Guilds that speed up research. Research, among other things, offers improvements for each of the game's three intriguing classes: Hunters armed with shoulder-mounted bows, lightly armored, bomb-toting Alchemists, and Caberjacks, battering ram-wielding melee tanks.

Attacks on the kingdom trigger a turn-based squad-tactics game, spiced up by the increasingly overworked specter of permadeath. Every hero on the field has two action points per turn, used for movement,

basic attacks and special skills. And yes, accuracy ratings still reduce attacks to occasionally frustrating dice rolls. Fighters can level up as you play, enabling you to specialize their skills and even earning them cute little nicknames in the process. There's a terrifyingly opaque fog of war. Enemies will pounce and punish you for the slightest mistake. It's *XCOM*, basically.

The difference, then, isn't one of mechanics, but scale. With 300 years to wait, and immortality in short supply, permadeath extends to more than getting some eldritch beast's talon stuck through your temple: old age is the biggest killer of all. You fight this by setting up Bloodlines. Every time you build a Keep, you install a Regent – who lends their surname and their reproductive organs to the cause. You then choose them a Partner, and sit back to wait for the offscreen magic to happen. When they die, you choose one of their children to be a successor and the line continues.

Here's where eugenics comes in. Every character has Traits and Personality modifiers. While Personalities are mutable – they can be learned from parents, teachers, even squadmates – Traits are directly passed down, meaning you want a Regent and Partner pairing to be strong as bears and free of, say, heart disease. Their classes are important,



Rule tool

The game offers one break from the manage-battle-manage *XCOM* rhythm, in the form of mini text adventures. You're presented with many decisions, from politics to what to do when a school trip arrives. Results are more catastrophic than you'd expect – we sent a man through a portal and he lost his genitals.

REVIEW



The Chalice is a combination weapon, teleportation device, healing pool and two narrators. Every home should have one.



Traits and Personalities can make huge differences depending on which class of hero they alter.



too, as cross-breeding leads to hybrid styles. With the right parents, Hunters can suddenly strap Alchemists' bombs to their arrows and melee types can use stealth.

The vaguely chilling effect is that you can be glad your 70-year-old Regent's Partner has just died, because you've spotted a fertile teenage Caberjack who'll spawn some powerful new type of war-baby. That said, you don't want either of the pairing to be too excellent, because assigning them these positions means they can never again be used on the battlefield. In *Massive Chalice*, sex is a full-time job.

This system cuts both ways. The length of time between battles means, unlike *XCOM*, you get relatively little time to get attached to soldiers – they've generally got six battles in them before they wither away. That said, you will get attached to lines as a whole. Such as the Gritfish family, a proud lineage of melee warriors,

"Parents can never re-enter the battlefield – sex is a full-time job"

spoiled only slightly by one poorly chosen husband who made the entire line slightly too stupid to help out with research. Or the doomed Baltocles clan, whose best ever warrior created a Relic Weapon – only for the effects of inbreeding to have it passed down to a nervous, nearsighted old man who promptly blew himself up, killing the family name in the process.

It's intriguing, for sure, but on a design level it can lead to a dead end you could never foresee – a bad Bloodline can doom you a century (or, in real terms, several hours) before you realize. Even then, you could become a little bored. The six enemy types – weird as they are, with powers to

steal your XP or even age your warriors to death – become predictable very quickly. Research is limited enough that you have barely any room to experiment. Replay value comes only if you're interested in being increasingly efficient, rather than creative.

Eugenics is, perhaps fittingly, the game's strongest trait. It offers you a measure of control over your heroes, a sense of micro-management mastery over the world. But the game's other characteristics are weaker – an impression of *XCOM*, rather than a successor to it. It seems we can't resist the metaphor, after all: like Tesla, there's brilliance here, but the flaws are hard to ignore. **OXM**

Ruptures explode upon death – attack from a distance.

The OXM Verdict

PRO TIP



Invest in a Keep for each class type as early as possible, then reap the rewards.

THE WORST BIT



Having a Twitcher swap places with your hero, teleporting them into the midst of danger.

COMPLETION CLOCK



OVERALL

With a bit of selective breeding, *Massive Chalice* could be a marvel. As it stands, though, it's a charmingly weird – if slightly too slim – take on the *XCOM* formula.



REVIEW

Rodrik Forrester's lot is not an easy one, balancing good sense with a show of strength.

Eavesdropping will get you everywhere.



PUBLISHER TELLTALE GAMES / DEVELOPER TELLTALE GAMES / FORMAT XBOX 360, XBOX ONE (REVIEWED) / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW



REVIEWER

EMMA DAVIES

Live OXM Emma

@emcetera

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?

The usual Telltale drill, featuring *GoT*'s new fringe family.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

Largely fun – just don't look too closely at the backgrounds.

WHO'S IT FOR?

People who've played *Episode 1-3* – latecomers need not apply.

GAME OF THRONES: EPISODE 4 – SONS OF WINTER

Like winter, you wish we could have got here long ago

So, we've survived past the halfway point of Telltale's series – in George RR Martin terms, this makes us players practically veterans. OG Westerosi, if you will. And here's where we're at: Rodrik Forrester is attempting to stand on his shattered legs to fortify both Ironrath and his unfortunate family against Whitehill marauders. Meanwhile sister Mira is mired in conspiracy in King's Landing, sellsword brother Asher seems to be having an aurochs of a time slashing his way through Slaver's Bay, and deposed steward Garrett Tuttle has just offed his father's killer atop the Wall. Do keep up.

Things are finally starting to happen. After parlaying with a capricious Dany, Asher and feisty sister-in-arms Beskha

are tasked with helping to liberate Meereen, resulting in simple sneaking and some enjoyable combat set-pieces as you take out guard after guard. As Mira, you move through the snakes' nest of a royal banquet, eavesdropping, bluff-calling and unearthing a dastardly plot. Garrett sets off for the frozen wastes beyond the Wall, and Rodrik pays a visit to Ludd Whitehill in the hopes of securing baby brother Ryon's safe return. There are dark revelations, as well as decisions to keep or spill secrets, take or spare lives, and pick up or leave a bag of onions. Tricky.

But while the choices in the previous episode felt like they *might* not have that much of an impact, the outcomes here reveal how hands-off the story actually is. At one point, for instance,

we got gung-ho with our diplomatic negotiation – not even in combat – and ended up being what can only be described as 'Red Wedding-ed'. The result? A 'Valar morghulis' game over screen. Why include such choices if the game judges them as wrong?

Frustrating, too, are the aesthetic missteps that persist. Some of the accents are all over the place and the loads can be lengthy. Much of the scenery looks as if it's been smeared with Vaseline, and even some characters boast disturbingly jaggy edges. It's less noticeable in the murky grey hinterlands of the North, but in the sunnier climes of Meereen, say, it's near-omnipresent. Here's hoping Rodrik's revenge is enough to overshadow these next time. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

PRO TIP



Play nice with Wildlings. They have pointy things like this, so don't get too close.

KEY INFLUENCES



60% *A Song of Ice and Fire*
30% Jerry Springer
10% Monet

DID YOU KNOW?

George RR Martin does all of his writing on an old DOS machine running an '80s-era word processor program.

OVERALL

Like plowing through one of Martin's epic tomes, this is often entertaining but occasionally a bit of a slog. We've invested too much time to quit, but we'll need some big events next time.



More than most games, *Life is Strange* gets away with reusing most of its central locations.

REVIEW



Chaos Theory has another moment where you can simply pause and listen to music.



PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX / DEVELOPER DONTNOD ENTERTAINMENT / FORMAT XBOX 360, XBOX ONE (REVIEWED) / RELEASE DATE OUT NOW



REVIEWER
CHRIS SCHILLING
Live Rockin Stroll
@schillingc

THE KNOWLEDGE

WHAT IS IT?

More time-manipulating shenanigans in the third episode of a five-part drama.

WHAT'S IT LIKE?

A new peak – effectively blends character beats and plot developments.

WHO'S IT FOR?

Anyone who's recovered from *Episode 2*'s draining climax.

LIFE IS STRANGE: EPISODE 3 – CHAOS THEORY

Splinter Cell meets The Butterfly Effect?

Whether *Life is Strange* had begun to find its feet by the end of *Episode 2*, or we'd just acclimatized to its unorthodox rhythms, is hard to gauge. Either way, *Chaos Theory* feels like the most confident and consistent episode to date, developing its characters successfully while simultaneously moving the plot forward – previously, it tended to be one or the other. It feels noticeably shorter than *Out of Time*, but that's mostly down to the momentum it builds – even though it still gives you at least one moment of blissful downtime. If it doesn't quite top *Episode 2*'s climax in the emotional stakes, its final sequence is gripping and surprising in a very different way.

However *Episode 2* concluded for you, the aftermath is a driving force for what happens here as Max – dealing with her unwanted campus celebrity – and Chloe investigate what drove Kate onto the roof, and what connection the school may or may not have to the missing Rachel Amber. Naturally, this involves sneaking around after dark.

Away from the Academy, there's more evidence that all is not right in Arcadia Bay in general. Dead birds are turning up everywhere, and if you engage in conversation with the sour-faced fisherman near the diner, he'll grumble about all the local fish having disappeared – and there's worse to come on the marine front. As your investigations begin to pull some of the narrative threads together, you're

confronted with a tense stealth set-piece, a neat locked-door puzzle and that classic moment where knowledge gained from one character allows you to open up another in conversation.

You might think you know where it's headed, but there's a surprise in wait: Max's powers develop in unexpected ways, leading to a startling final-reel reveal that will have you itching to see what happens next. In one sense it's mildly disappointing, as the needs of the narrative force you down a particular path, but the ramifications are potentially huge. It's a watermark moment for the series, as the wait for the next episode feels more brutally unfair than ever: a testament to how utterly absorbing Dontnod's slow-burn drama has become. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

PRO TIP



Search the RV thoroughly when you get the chance – we think it might pay off later on...

THE BEST BIT



Max realizes her powers extend further than anticipated. But is she tinkering too much?

COMPLETION CLOCK



OVERALL

With improved dialogue and pacing – and a handful of bold design choices – this is perhaps the strongest episode so far, with a finale you'll be desperate to discuss with friends.





The top-down bent makes purely cosmetic items fairly redundant, so there's little need to fork out for them.

PUBLISHER UBISOFT / **DEVELOPER** CARBON GAMES / **FORMAT** XBOX ONE / **ORIGINAL SCORE** 8/10

AIRMECH ARENA

MOBAs in disguise



REVIEWER
Matthew Gilman
LIVE G-maniacal
@Gmaniacal

WE SAID

A smart blend of ideas from MOBAs, action games and RTSs with intense yet rewarding multiplayer.

Such is the lure of the transforming-robot-action-figure-styled avatars that you take control of in this top-down real-time strategy game, that it'll take you a while to recognize what it really is. It's a MOBA you see. Yes, one of those infectiously tough, lane-based multiplayer games that seem to be doing all the numbers these days.

The difference here is that while a 40-minute stint inside

one of its PC brethren, say *League of Legends* or the notoriously hardcore *Dota 2*, will likely see you reeling from an endless barrage of naughty comments all involving your mom, *AirMech Arena* is a much more sterile affair.

Not that it isn't full to the brim with its own brand of mid-to-high-octane action. Those aforementioned mecha heroes

that you control are the fulcrum of a miniature army of robotic minions and armored vehicles. From the relative safety of your home base you have to dart about the map tactically constructing units and then placing them where they can do the most harm to your opposite number's forces. At times it's heady stuff, as you frantically sail about in your airborne form attempting to whittle away at a base, only to realize you need to actively wrangle your team of AI minions back to defend the home front.

Actively participating in unit placement has its downside. In order to be effective, the units you build must be manually placed on the battlefield and Carbon has yet to solve the perennial problems of RTS gamepad controls. You might think you're hovering over that turret bay, but the gun you place will every so often decide that, no, you're actually a millimeter out of whack and must try again. And again. Just one more time.

Playing online, both in co-op and in player vs player, we can't help but feel like the experience is a little bland. It all runs smoothly, with none of the lag that had the Xbox 360 version by the rivets. But as you go through the motions, placing units and whittling your way through a match, you'll start to feel like something is missing. The spice, perhaps, of a more active mid-match chat function?

"This has none of the lag that had the Xbox 360 version by the rivets"

ARE WE HAVING FUN YET? Our first hour rendered as a wavy line...





It's a shame the characters you pick for your portraits don't have, well, more character.

There is a ridiculous plot, involving the apocalypse. Because sure, we'd all be knocking about in robots if the apocalypse struck.



Outside of the battles, the free-to-play systems are... not the greatest. You can earn currency as you play, which enables you to purchase most of the game-changing stuff, such as new units and mechs that will improve your lot. But far too many things are locked behind the Diamond currency, and the real world cash needed to buy it. If you do find yourself hooked, however, then there is a neat Premium option, which should put a cap on your spending at \$20. A noteworthy dash of respect for its players there, which we think more free to play games should implement.

It's not going to set your world alight, and it's certainly not the MOBA reborn for consoles, but there's enough in *AirMech Arena* to entice those keen to give this notorious genre a test run. **OXM**

■ The OXM Verdict

A good intro to ease you into the genre, but the lack of multiplayer spice disappoints.

6



■ PUBLISHER BANDAI NAMCO / DEVELOPER SLIGHTLY MAD STUDIOS / FORMAT XBOX ONE / ORIGINAL SCORE 7/10

PROJECT CARS

Probably best to host your own session in this one...



REVIEWER
Justin Towell
LIVE CatGoneCrazy
@CatGoneCrazy

WE SAID

When it works, it's unbelievably good. But bugs and over-aggressive AI mean it's just shy of greatness.

You know that saying about how some people just want to watch the world burn? Those people play *Project CARS*. After a perfectly normal race, they'll suddenly change the lobby to all assists banned, Formula A cars (the equivalent of F1) and then the weather to 'thunderstorm'. *On the Nordschleife*.

Some other drivers just want to crash into as many people as possible. The first corner is often the scene of horrifying accidents where virtual people surely die. The screaming must be lost in the surround mix, but it's got to be there. You'd think a full-fat racing sim like this would be full of more gentlemanly racers, but that isn't *always* the case.

Not always, but thankfully sometimes. And, once you do find a decent race with people who actually want to compete properly, it really is mega-exciting. That feeling of trying to 'keep it on the island' once you've made it into P1 is an adrenaline rush when the cars chasing you are real people.

It's a pity the open-wheeled cars are, well, open-wheeled – because the purity of the racing that the likes of Formula Rookie offer is superb, until you get tangled up in someone else's round bits (which can be exacerbated by a jittery net connection) and it all falls apart.

Knocking into other racers is easy to get away with, especially in saloon cars, but corner-cutting reduces your engine

power for a set time, which is a decent deterrent. There are occasional, brief freezes, and the occasional crash bug, too. But for the most part, this looks and feels just like offline.

Community challenges are available, set up by Slightly Mad, with everything from time trials to championships. And there are even prizes on offer occasionally too, such as peripherals from Thrustmaster, which are a really nice incentive to get involved. Time trials run for a few days at a time, so there's plenty of time to hone your laps.

The servers aren't exactly bustling with people. You can usually find a race quickly enough, but it will rarely contain more than five entrants. Of course, you can set up your own race (and that's certainly the way to go if you're serious), and then you should have all the fun. Just keep an eye on your mirrors for incoming madmen. **OXM**

■ The OXM Verdict

Hard to find a good race, but when you do, this is superbly competitive and exciting.

7



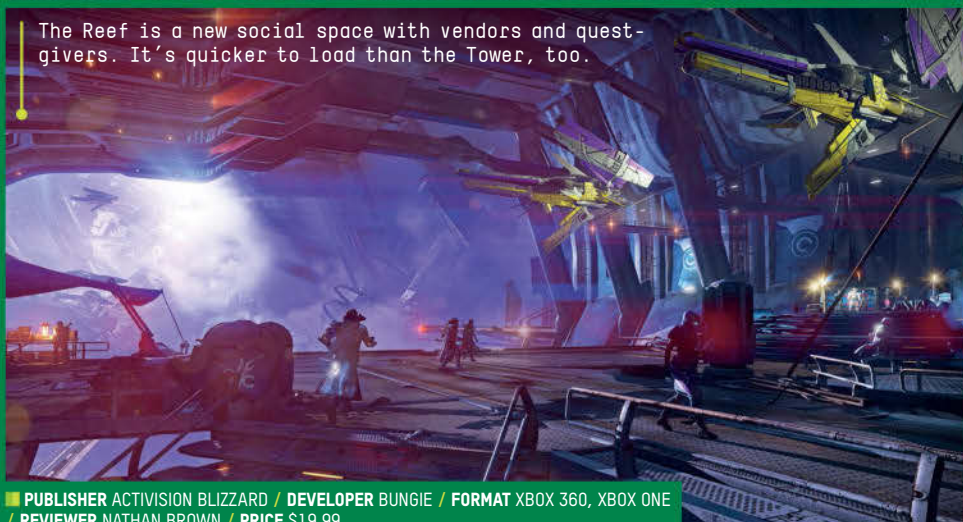
Setting up your own event is easy, and there's so much to choose from.



ON THE DOWNLOAD

Latest add-ons and indie games rated

The Reef is a new social space with vendors and quest-givers. It's quicker to load than the Tower, too.



PUBLISHER ACTIVISION BLIZZARD / **DEVELOPER** BUNGIE / **FORMAT** XBOX 360, XBOX ONE
/ **REVIEWER** NATHAN BROWN / **PRICE** \$19.99

DESTINY: HOUSE OF WOLVES

Bungie's latest brings welcome relief to the daily grind

Nine months, three max-level characters and many hundreds of hours later, we are perfectly aware how ludicrous it is that we're still playing *Destiny*. So regular and repetitive is the *Destiny* addict's to-do list, and so slow is the measurable progress, that in our darker moments we have come to view it as a job. A pleasurable one, sure, but a ceaseless, sometimes even boring one where you frequently question your life choices and your employer decides how much you're getting paid – if you're getting paid at all – with the roll of a dice.

There have been times when we thought we'd had enough of it, updated our metaphorical CV and considered a career

change, only to come crawling back after realizing that nothing else is able to quite scratch that *Destiny* itch. Perhaps it will get better, we thought. Surely it has to. Nine months, 500 developers and two expansions later, it finally has.

There's plenty of new content, but it's the changes beneath the surface that matter most. Drop rates have been increased, with an evening in the Crucible now

yielding several new toys to play with. And when new guns and armor drop, they're already at their maximum damage or armor level; you need only upgrade them to unlock their associated perks. Level-cap gear is now available by defined, guaranteed means, rather than by running the latest raid ad infinitum in the hope of getting the loot you need. And a new item, Etheric Light, will upgrade any existing weapon or piece of armor to the new maximum.

It, too, is a guaranteed drop from the two new headline additions. For PvE players, the wave-based Prison of Elders mode is no substitute for a

raid, but stages, bosses and gameplay modifiers rotate every week to keep things fresh, and are chosen by Bungie rather than passed off to an algorithm like so much of the base game. Trials of Osiris, a three-on-three weekend PvP event set on a single map each week, is an absolute triumph. With no respawns until a full team is killed and the first to five rounds winning the match, it

adds a welcome layer of tactics, teamwork and strategy to a PvP component that is too often about randoms

running about with shotguns being stupid. For all the understandable sadness at the lack of a raid, some fine new additions and smart, if overdue tweaks under the hood mean that *Destiny* has never been in better shape. **OXM**

The OXM Verdict

A generous expansion in both content and spirit. *Destiny* is slowly starting to live up to the hype.

8



Win nine straight Trials of Osiris matches and you can open a treasure chest on Mercury. Lose three and you're out.

ALSO RELEASED

From best to worst, the latest additions to Xbox Live Marketplace



1 THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT – BEARD AND HAIRSTYLE SET

Customize Geralt with this selection of hairstyles and beards. A great game just hit a hairy high.

Price: FREE



2 DRAGON AGE: INQUISITION – SPOILS OF THE AVVAR

Includes five Avvar mounts, two armor sets, and more customization.

Price: \$4.99



3 PROJECT CARS – LIVERIES PACK #1

Ten cars created by YOU, the *Project Cars* community. If they're bad, you've only got yourselves to blame, haven't you?

Price: FREE



4 FORZA HORIZON 2 – PORSCHE EXPANSION PACK

Ten new and classic Porsches, straight in your garage with no in-game cost, after the slightly steep in-life one.

Price: \$9.99



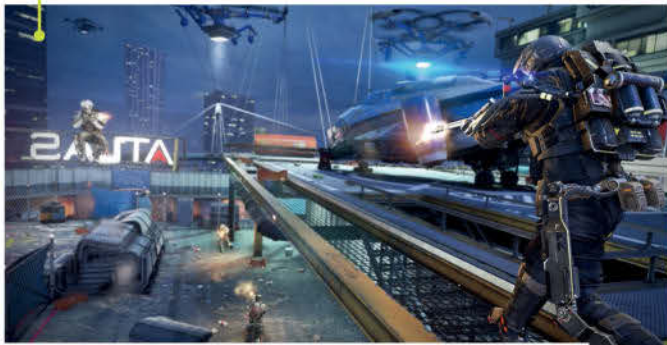
5 FARMING SIMULATOR 15 – THE LAMBORGHINI NITRO 120 TRACTOR

Once downloaded, you'll have to buy it again in-game. Don't even buy it once.

Price: \$0.99

Skyrise gets our vote every time.

Optional execution chambers throw waves of foes at you. Happily, you can throw them back.



FORMAT XBOX ONE, XBOX 360 / REVIEWER MARTIN KITTS / PRICE \$14.99



FORMAT XBOX ONE, XBOX 360 / REVIEWER CHRIS SCHILLING / PRICE \$4.99

REVIEW

CALL OF DUTY ADVANCED WARFARE: SUPREMACY

While *Supremacy* doesn't bring us new features quite as substantial as the grappling hook from *Ascendance* or the Exo Zombies from *Havoc*, it does introduce cult horror movie nutcase Bruce Campbell as a playable character. And he does make room for himself in the Zombies cast by shooting John Malkovich in the face, which isn't something you see in your typical everyday DLC.

The action proceeds aboard a zombie-infested ship, where it's business as usual. The

playing area is confusingly huge, and because the spawn points separate players into pairs at the start you'll need at least a couple of competent zombie aficionados to carry a team of randoms through to the latter stages.

//Skyrise is a breathless experience from start to finish//

On the competitive map front, the pick of the four is *Skyrise*, a remake of the excellent *Highrise* from *MW2*. The super-fast, bouncy, grapple movement of *Advanced Warfare* means the map is much less of a campfest than in *MW2*, making it a breathless experience from start to finish.

Parliament is set among cargo ships, with some commanding overwatch points that are offset

by the ability of respawning headshot victims to reach snipers in a couple of well-timed leaps. Kremlin has a pair of powerful

gun emplacements to fight over, offering temporary dominance of the center ground. Compound is well suited to shotguns and SMGs.

While it doesn't offer much we haven't seen already, it does bring some fresh locations to MP. **OXM**

THE EVIL WITHIN: THE EXECUTIONER

It's ironic that we finally get an unrestricted view of Tango's grisly mise-en-scène while playing as a man with a massive safe on his head, but that's far from the weirdest thing about *The Executioner*. It's an experimental kind of add-on, a first-person melee-focused brawler that repurposes environments from the campaign and invites you to bludgeon enemies to a meaty

paste within them. We admire that it's trying something new, but it loses much of what made the main game great.

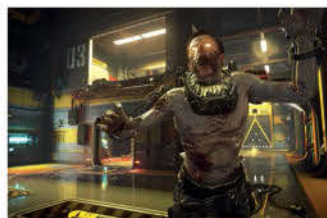
You play as a father, assuming this powerful form in an attempt to rescue your daughter from within the nightmarish Animus-alike that is STEM. This amounts to a series of encounters against bosses you already faced as

Sebastian Castellanos, only this time you're built like a fleshy mech. There's plenty of mallet-fodder between the big fights, and you'll upgrade abilities and unlock additional weapons as you progress. Combat's messy in every sense: you'll squish skulls into soup with context-sensitive finishers, but while there's a heft to your blows, it's all rather scrappy and awkward.

It's short, too, though it tries to string things out by introducing a one-hit-kill during the last battle, and making you play

through again to face the proper final boss. We'd be lying if we said we didn't have some gory fun with it, but while the previous two episodes might have justified the cost of a Season Pass, this is an anticlimactic way to end. **OXM**

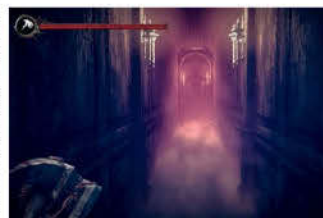
//You'll squish skulls into soup with context-sensitive finishers//



The OXM Verdict

Adds four solid new maps and the chance to see Bruce Campbell killing John Malkovich.

7



The OXM Verdict

A laudably risky departure from the main game and a fine idea, paradoxically lacking in execution.

6

Indie Roundup – Horror Special / A themed look at hidden gems and DIY disasters



ONE NIGHT YOU'RE CRAZY

Search photos of a bland house to find your missing limbs before a wolf eats you. Crazy bad.



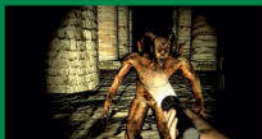
HALLOWEEN SCREAM 2

Mildly educational text adventure set in the British Museum. Hold up, where are our screams?



A MADMAN'S GUIDE TO HAPPINESS

Disturbing text-heavy title, with lame puzzles and no scares. Almost as short as this review.



THE MONASTERY

Find 15 Bibles while a slow, not-scary-in-the-least demon chases you. Can go straight to hell.



DECAY: THE MARE

Tense atmospheric exploration, with good production values, for an indie, and some decent scares.



NEXT MONTH

GEARS OF WAR

OXM CELEBRATES THE PAST, PRESENT
AND FUTURE OF XBOX'S ICONIC SHOOTER



XBOX 360 GAMES EVERYONE MUST PLAY

KUDO TSUNODA TALKS XBOX AND HOLOLENS

HOW ROCKSTEADY BUILT A BETTER BATMAN

ON SALE
18/08/15

SUBSCRIBE ON
PAGE 66

All contents subject to change. Sorry about that.

XBOX EXTRA

Squeezing more from your machine every month



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THE WITCHER 3

Becoming Velen's most badass card shark.



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88 OXM Investigates

The biggest battles won and lost by Xbox at E3 conferences past.

90 Now Playing: The Witcher 3

Battling the Wild Hunt? Nah, we're too busy betting on Gwent in taverns, thanks.

92 Now Playing: Sunset Overdrive

Scientifically proven fact: games are 74% more loveable when they come in neon colors.

93 Now Playing: Limbo

In which we compare a spider to a giant tear 'n' share bread. Mmm, garlicky.

94 Live Spotlight

How to slide your way to the perfect Daenerys avatar in *Dragon Age: Inquisition*.

96 OXM Replay

With hindsight, *Red Dead Redemption* still manages to hold its own in the Rockstar stable.

98 Sims We Want on Xbox

Farming Simulator doesn't cut it for us – we want *Flight Attendant Simulator* and we want it as soon as the seatbelt sign has gone off.



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XBOX EXTRA

E3
ELECTRONIC
ENTERTAINMENT
EXPO

OXM
INVESTIGATES



Uncovering
the other side of
Xbox gaming



Xbox's Most Epic E3 Battles

A look back at 15 years of valiant victories and bitter defeats on the grandest stage of them all

Unbelievably, this year's E3 was the sixteenth in a row at which Xbox had a presence. Who could have possibly predicted that when Team Green made its E3 bow 15 (years are weird like that) years ago? Back in 2000, Microsoft, for all its money and resources, was seen as a stuffy upstart that didn't and couldn't understand the industry in the same way as the dominant forces of the day – Sony, Sega and Nintendo – did.

But one thing Microsoft understood very early on is that the words spoken at the E3 show echo long and loud. It's the one week of the year where the eyes of the entire world are on the games industry, and a killer presentation or sick burn can make all the difference later down the line. With that in mind, here are some of the most critical battles Microsoft has fought at E3 – and how its victories paved the way for Xbox's dramatic rise to gaming's top table.

//The eyes of the world are on the industry, and a killer presentation or a sick burn can make all the difference later down the line//



E3 2000 – Xbox's muted debut

The good: When you're the new kid in class, butterflies aren't the conventional weapon of choice when you're trying to establish yourself as the new school bully. But those daintiest of insects put on a fearsome display of the original Xbox's processing power in a stunning (for its time) tech demo, as they wafted around a Japanese garden in their hundreds before congregating to form an X. For 'Xbox', see?

The not-so-good: The prototype console was literally a giant X. Yeah, nice one.

Did Xbox 'win' E3? Nah. The fledgling console's peacocking display was overshadowed by a number of impressive gameplay trailers, not least among them *Metal Gear Solid 2*. The consensus was that Xbox had the brawn, but no games to show for it. Unbeknownst to us at the time, however, Microsoft's checkbook was already working on a solution...



E3 2006 – The tattoo that shocked the world

The good: Peter Moore, vice-president of Microsoft's Xbox division from 2003 to 2007, was a regular heartthrob. All he had to do was show us his guns and Xbox fans worldwide would swoon. Or at least his penchant for 'tattooing' exciting announcements onto them would. He saved his most swoonworthy tat for E3 2006 – *Grand Theft Auto IV*! On Xbox 360!

The not-so-good: Sony famously had a 'mare during its conference. 'Giant enemy crabs', 'real-time weapon change' and 'riiidge racerrrrr' are the stuff of meme legend.

Did Xbox 'win' E3? Absolutely. The announcement that *GTA IV* was coming to Xbox 360, on day one, with timed-exclusive DLC, was a turning point in the console wars. From *PES* to *DMC*, almost all of PS2's big third-party exclusives crossed the divide to Xbox.



E3 2001 – Halo's console rebirth

The good: A month after E3 2000, Microsoft snapped up Bungie Software – a PC and Mac studio that had wowed onlookers at the show with gameplay footage of *Halo: Combat Evolved* – a third-person action game with expansive, open-world combat and rideable beasts. Microsoft and Bungie flaunted a much-changed *Halo* at E3 2001, now an Xbox exclusive and looking much more like the masterful FPS we know and love today.

The not-so-good: Sony deviously held an all-night party the day before Microsoft's early-morning briefing, so everyone walked into the hall looking worse for wear, and with a gallon of cold carrot broth in their throats. Dastardly.

Did Xbox 'win' E3? It left quite an impression. *Halo*'s eye-popping demo, along with the Xbox controller's innovative layout, hinted that FPS games could finally play nice on console.



E3 2010 – The dawn of Kinect

The good: Before the show, Microsoft claimed it was going to treat the launch of Kinect as if it were a brand-new console, and this was reflected in a delightfully extravagant reveal on the eve of E3 2010. Called the Project Natal Experience, this exclusive event stuffed attendees into a white poncho with gaudy light-up shoulder pads and implored them to watch performance art as imagined by the Cirque du Soleil. This meant tribal dancers, fire-breathing tricks and, er, an elephant.

The not-so-good: Needless to say, when the pomp and circumstance ended and the demos of *Kinect Joy Ride* began, you could feel the mood deflate so fast you could hear the hiss.

Did Xbox 'win' E3? Certainly not. But the infatuation with 'new ways to play' was the fad of the day – Nintendo was frantically courting the yoga mum vote. Let's just call it a draw.



E3 2004 – Xbox comes of age

The good: Widely acknowledged as one of the all-time great E3 presentations, Xbox's 2004 offering delivered a killer lineup of exclusives that catered for all tastes – from blockbuster shooters such as *Halo 2* to the *Gran Turismo*-worrying *Forza Motorsport*, to *Jade Empire*, a BioWare RPG set in ancient China. But the announcements that made the longest-lasting impact were structural, with the announcement of Xbox Live Arcade, enabling us to download games direct to the console's hard drive. It'll never catch on.

The not-so-good: *The Novice*, a pre-taped send-up of *The Apprentice*, starring numerous Sony execs pitching online game ideas to Donald Trump, was a bit whiffy.

Did Xbox 'win' E3? It's a photo finish between *Halo 2*, *Half-Life 2* and *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess*.



E3 2013 – Xbox One's rocky road to success

The good: Games, games, games! Xbox One came into E3 2013 riding a tidal wave of toxic criticism, thanks to a reveal event a month prior that focused too heavily on TV connectivity and barely mentioned games. A game-packed conference sought to address that balance and did so with style. *Halo 5*, *Ryse*, *Forza 5*, *Dead Rising 3*, *MGS V*...

The not-so-good: Unfortunately, Microsoft's E3 was compromised by mixed messages about how the console's 'always-on' requirement would work. Sensing blood, Sony savaged Xbox One during its PS4 reveal, mocking the price and policies toward used games and more.

Did Xbox 'win' E3? Not a chance – but in retrospect it was the first step toward the healing process for Xbox One, as Microsoft listened to feedback from the show.



E3 2005 – Battle of the next-gen behemoths

The good: The Xbox 360 hype machine was firing on all cylinders coming into the 2005 event. On a live MTV special, broadcast just days before E3 began, the console was unveiled in a star-studded show hosted by Elijah Wood. Flanked by a bumper crop of exclusives, including *Gears of War* and *Alan Wake*, all indications pointed toward Microsoft's new wonder stealing the show.

The not-so-good: Microsoft's presentation was merely solid – not enough to divert attention away from Sony's PS3 reveal, which showed footage of launch titles that appeared to be a clear graphical leap over any Xbox offerings.

Did Xbox 'win' E3? Memorably and predictably, the PS3 trailers turned out to be 'target renders' – the finished games were markedly less impressive. But the damage was done.



E3 2014 – The second coming

The good: The seeds planted by the past year's policy changes had begun to sprout by the time E3 2014 rolled around. Indie titles such as *Inside* and *Mighty No. 9* featured prominently, alongside blockbusters like *Forza Horizon 2*, *Scalebound* and *Sunset Overdrive*.

The not-so-good: The well-meaning #myfavoritegame vignette backfired somewhat, when the majority of devs picked titles not playable on Xbox. Respect to *Killer Instinct*'s Ken Lobb for toeing the company line – his is *Crackdown*, apparently.

Did Xbox 'win' E3? Kinda. Sony also flaunted a strong line-up, headlined by *Uncharted 4* and *Bloodborne*, but the Xbox conference had more games penciled in for a 2014 release. After the previous year's humbling, this was a steady conference that set the table for E3 2015 – when Xbox One fought back.



NOW
PLAYING

The games we're
still going back
to, and why

You may think this
game is about
chopping up bandits
and dragons, but
The Witcher 3 has an
ace up its sleeve.

Tom Senior is playing...

The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt



BECAUSE... "It's secretly an amazing card game"

▲ **LOVING** Building the best Gwent deck in the Northern Realms ▼ **HATING** Every creature that won't play Gwent with me

I'm on a quest to become the finest Gwent player in the Northern Kingdoms. It's a whole card game hidden inside *The Witcher 3*, and it became obvious the moment I first sat down with a traveler to play a hand: this game isn't about monsters any more. Unless the monsters can play Gwent, in which case I'll take them all on, wyvern, dragon and frost giant alike.

The rules are simple. You put together a deck of soldier cards and take it in turns to play them into three rows on the board: close range, bow range and siege range. Soldier cards have attack values that contribute to your overall attack number. If yours is bigger than your opponent's, you win the round. The genius of Gwent is that you draw ten cards at the start of the game, and have to play them sparingly across all three rounds.

You can bet on matches, of course, because the dev apparently didn't realize it had invented the most potent form of mind-crack since Sudoku and wanted to make things even more addictive. What's more, for every game you win you get another card, and there are loads to gather all over the world. Some of the best are hidden away as high-level loot in dungeons. Some are sold by local vendors for a high price. I must have them all.

When I started playing Gwent I didn't realize how deep the rabbit hole went. Now I see it everywhere. All my decisions are in some way about Gwent. I don't especially care about the main quest, but when it offers me the chance to go to the huge city of Novigrad I'm filled with glee. Cities have people, and people have brains and opposable thumbs, and therefore might play Gwent. In Velen, a

DETAILS

Released

May 2015

Dev

CD Projekt RED

Pub

Bandai Namco

Format Xbox One

Score 9/10

Recap

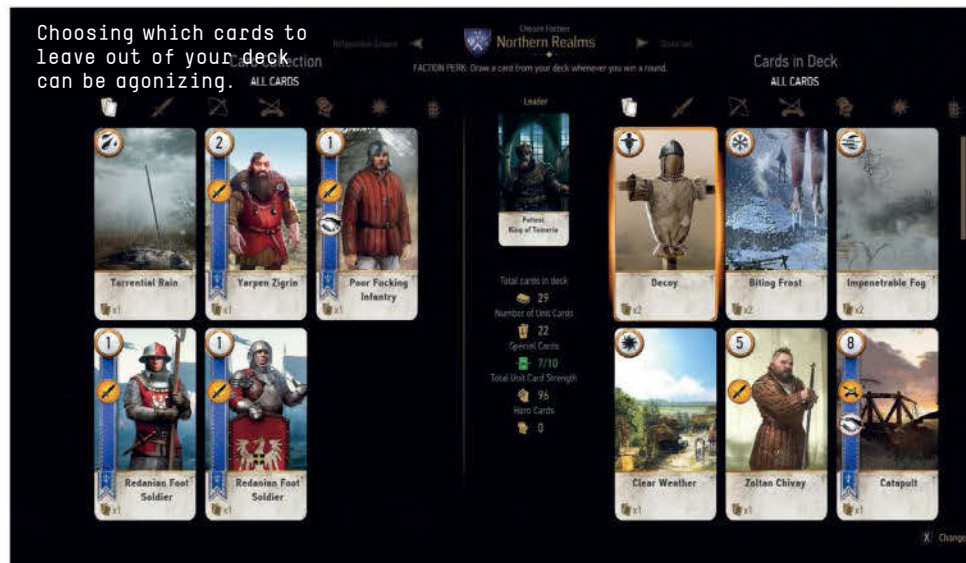
A beautiful sprawling, open world full of monsters to slay, maidens to romance... and cards to collect.

tearful peasant wants me to take out a cockatrice that has been eating locals. I check my bestiary and find that it's a giant stupid bird thing. Probability of Gwent: zero. No deal, sad peasant guy.

When I enter a new town I case it for Gwent players. Innkeepers are a good bet, blacksmiths and some merchants like a cheeky game, but I'm after the boss players. Gwent is brilliant because it's played by peasants and barons alike, and powerful figures tend to have better cards. I start low, in the local taverns. Once I've won the low-level prize cards, I reforge my deck and take it to the local castle to challenge someone powerful.

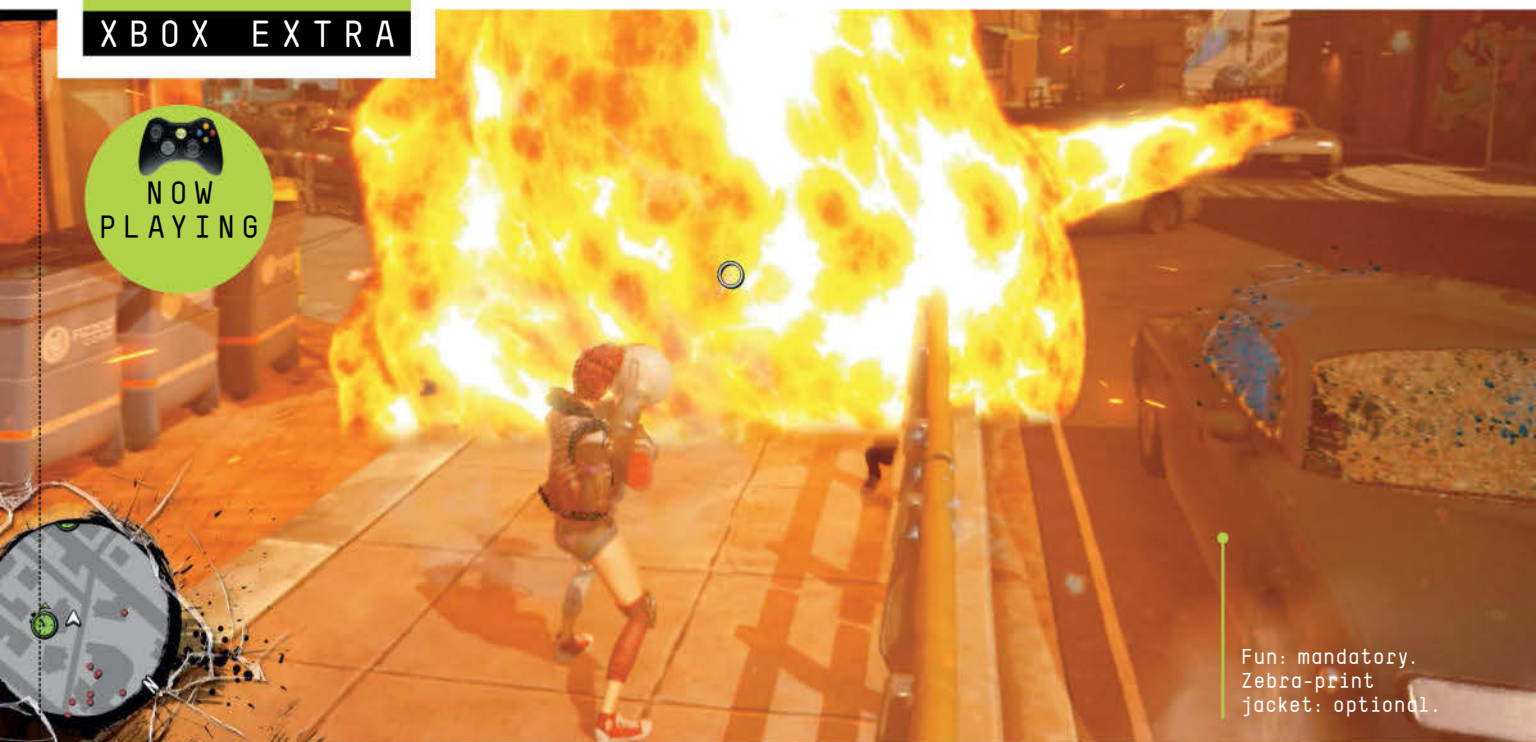
I am the Rocky Balboa of collectible card games. I'm going all the way to the top, so I have a simple challenge for everyone in the Northern Kingdoms: if you have a deck, come and meet me. I will take your money. I will take your cards. I will take your dignity. Then I'll ride out with my smoking-hot deck and destroy every player in the next town. ■

//Some cards are hidden, some are sold for a high price. I must have them all//





NOW
PLAYING



Fun: mandatory.
Zebra-print
jacket: optional.

Alice Bell is playing...

Sunset Overdrive



BECAUSE... "It's guaranteed to never get old for me"

▲ **LOVING** The infectious joy of cartoon violence ▼ **HATING** That I can't quit my job and play this full-time instead

To say that I'm 'now playing' *Sunset Overdrive* would be inaccurate, since I'm almost always playing it. It's my 'anytime' game – the game I turn to when I'm in need of an instant pick-me-up. It's inconceivable to me that anyone who has an Xbox One doesn't also own and love *Sunset Overdrive*.

The game demands constant attention and energy – even the plot, such as it is, is driven by the effects of having too many energy drinks. You're driven to keep moving and shooting all the time, or you'll be swarmed by trash-mob enemies. This is okay, though, because the game also encourages you to bounce around like a flea on

steroids, firing barrages from a range of high-concept weapons as you go. At the same time, it's incredibly easy to access. Death has no sting, because you come straight back, but it never feels patronizing. *Sunset Overdrive* doesn't make you feel inadequate for being bad at it. "Hey," it says. "That's cool, man; have another go. Try using the remote controlled helicopters with the pistols attached to them – they're really fun!"

In fact, the whole focus of the game is to have fun. *Sunset Overdrive* makes it especially easy to pick up and put the controller down at will because the framing narrative is purposefully loose. There's no moralizing plot, no demand for extreme skill, no real pressure at all – and, it insists, there is no shame

DETAILS

Released

Oct 2014

Dev

Insomniac Games

Pub

Microsoft Studios

Format Xbox One

Score 8/10

Recap

A fast-paced shooter played for laughs as you bounce, slide and eviscerate your way around a neon-lit metropolis.

in that. There is only beautiful mayhem in a mutant-infested playground. Whenever I need it, *Sunset City* is but a button press away, and no bad mood survives *Sunset Overdrive* attacking it with all the subtlety of a neon hurricane. Combine the right kit and you can *make* neon hurricanes.

It presents an environment awash in eye-watering contrasting colors; a soundtrack born of '80s rock, '90s punk and '00s indie; enemies that explode like pressurized paint tins; and it throws out pop-culture references without really caring if you get them or not. It's the videogame equivalent of a morning person who turns up at your house with a double espresso, and is either the very best or the very worst game to play with a hangover.

As a whole it's a weird mix of ideas, and sometimes they don't all work together. But like many mongrels, *Sunset Overdrive* has a hybrid vigor. It tips its head to one side and says, "Love me!" – and you do. You can't help it. ■

// No bad mood can last when *Sunset Overdrive* attacks it with all the subtlety of a neon hurricane //

Jenny Baker is playing...

Limbo



BECAUSE... "Running away isn't an option"

▲ **LOVING** The nameless boy's youthful vulnerability ▼ **HATING** The mammoth spider's eight hairy legs

Limbo's protagonist is a little boy with a very particular set of skills: walk left, walk right, pull object, push object, jump – he can't swim and he carries zero weapons. I like to think of him as a playable jelly bean; I'm fond of him because he's sweet, but I fear for his safety because he's squishy and edible, the opposite of his nemesis: the spider.

In reality, the spider is nothing more than a black silhouette on the screen – a virtual shadow puppet playing hide-and-seek. It is at least three times your size, has a penchant for showing up unannounced, and it has legs like kabob skewers that specialize in stabbing little jelly peeps at lightning speed.



Popping off the spider's legs isn't hard – technically it's just a matter of puzzle-solving, using yourself as a tasty piece of bait and knowing when to dislodge a nearby stick to release a boulder – but it is grotesque. By the time I reached the last leg, I was almost ready to squeak, "Xbox, turn off" as I forced myself to tug its eighth and final leg from its body.

DETAILS

Released

Jul 2010

Dev Playdead

Pub Playdead

Format Xbox 360, Xbox One

Score 9/10

Of course, while tackling a giant tear 'n' share spider in an eerily predetermined set of events is the stuff of nightmares, it really makes you appreciate the power of the 2D platformer. There are rules and restrictions; you can't just run away. You have to endure, confront and interact with your fears, even if those fears want to wrap you up in silk like a Halloween-themed breakfast burrito.

Playing *Limbo* is a bit like playing *Resident Evil* in professional mode – you have to stay calm and acknowledge your weaknesses. On the plus side, this is exactly the kind of lengthy boss battle you can recount to your friends on a cold winter's eve. Did I ever tell you about the time I caught a spider in a bear trap? ■

Emma Davies is playing...

The Walking Dead: S1



BECAUSE... "I didn't think I was this bad a person"

▲ **LOVING** That my actions have consequences ▼ **HATING** Dealing with the consequences of my actions

When it comes to a post-zombie apocalypse world, we're all going to have to make some tough choices. Some of us may get hurt. Some of us may not survive. And, y'know, some of us may end up pushing a teenager off a high ledge to their death. Okay, only 34% of people did that – and I was one of them. Look, I panicked, alright?

This choice toward the end of *Episode 4 – Around Every Corner* soon came back to haunt me. When those damning stats popped up at the end, informing me that only one in three people had been as callous as I had, I felt a keen flare of guilt. I soothed myself with the reassurance that it had been a snap

decision, made under the pressure of a rapidly depleting countdown timer.

Except, when I went to load up *Episode 5* a few days later, there'd been a glitch with my save. Half of my progress from *Episode 4* had been lost. While the prospect of going back was frustrating, it did at least offer me the chance for a do-over. I could save Ben. Yet, much as I felt bad about shoving him into a ravenous crowd of Walkers, saving him second time around just didn't sit right with me.

The point of a Telltale game is that it puts you on the spot. You make your choices, and you have to live with them. You don't get do-overs in real life. And so I resigned myself to painstakingly recreating my previous playthrough, decision by decision. I put the zombie

DETAILS

Released

Apr 2012

Dev Telltale Games

Pub Telltale Games

Format Xbox 360

Score 8/10

child out of his reanimated misery. I kept Clem by my side. And, well, I *reintroduced* Ben to gravity's clinging embrace. As the belltower segment loomed, dread filled my stomach. Not only had I shown myself to be a bad person when running on instinct, but when approaching the same scenario forewarned, I did the same thing again just in the name of *playing the game right*. That's the true test of character. I think I might be a monster. ■





XBOX EXTRA

LIVE
SPOT-
LIGHT

Reports from
Xbox's biggest
communities

5:29



Battlefield Hardline

The thin blue line gets thinner and thinner – is it time to quit?

Details Dev Visceral Games / Pub EA / Reporter Edwin Evans-Thirlwell



We stared at this man until he gave us ammo. The system works.



Why don't our local burglars use parachutes? No initiative, honestly.

To put *Battlefield Hardline's* present fortunes in terms a player will understand, the game is a bit like a Conquest match in which two of the flags are red and the third a desperately blinking blue, surrounded by predatory triangles like a swimmer's head among sharks.

At the time of writing, the Xbox versions of the game enjoy half the player count of *BF4*, the shooter whose launch bugs more or less totaled DICE's reputation for network programming in the space of a month. You can still get into a round fairly easily, but these are dismal tidings on the whole, with the first *Hardline* DLC pack only just on sale, and yet another crop of multiplayer shooters just over the horizon.

Why hasn't the new *Battlefield* found its feet? We suspect the initial absence of Prestige-style rank resets has played a part, and there are the usual *Battlefield*-y bones of contention

ON THE CLOCK
How we spent our time in the game



20% Popping a smoke grenade near the enemy's cash vault
28% Crying in the mobile command center
42% Crawling in rubble towards a conquest flag
10% Cursing our dim-witted getaway driver. Whenever you're ready, Big Floyd

– helicopters are either stupidly overpowered or made of crockery, depending on who you talk to, and the debate over *Call of Duty's* corrosive influence refuses to abate. We think the fundamental issue, though, is that *Hardline's* multiplayer just doesn't have much of a personality, however smart its design on paper. Players haven't fallen in love with the non-military fiction – not least because it means there's less to blow up.

This is unfortunate, because *Hardline's* modes continue to strike a fine balance between scale and intensity – loony, vehicle-heavy extravaganzas on the one hand, taut interior duels featuring VIPs on the other. Now is a great time to get involved, if only to witness the dastardly ways skilled teams have found to abuse the layouts. One of our recent matches saw a party of four crash-land a helicopter on both sides of a rooftop, sealing it off. An absolute pain in the jacksy, for sure, but it's the kind of insanity *Battlefield* could do with far more of. ■

IF YOU DO ONE THING IN BATTLEFIELD HARDLINE THIS MONTH, MAKE IT...

Returning to Crosshair, the game's VIP escort mode. It's too quiet there.



Dragon Age: Inquisition

Game of Thrones arrives in Thedas thanks to Reddit's Many-Faced Gods

Dev BioWare / Pub EA / Reporter Matthew Castle

Forget the giant hole in the sky vomiting out demons; *winter is coming*. Or it is in our Thedas, where the character creator spits out a perfect recreation of *Game of Thrones'* Daenerys Targaryen. It captures the girlish face that would not hurt a fly, but with that streak of steel that ensures there are plenty of flies buzzing around the sea of corpses she's created. Whether or not she makes it to the Iron Throne is yet to be seen, but she certainly looks comfortable in the Inquisitor's Throne.

The lookalike was no facial fluke, of course, but a creation by Reddit's stellar Inquisition Sliders community (r/inquisition sliders). These digital sculptors push muscle configuration to incredible places – Daenerys looks better than Telltale's licensed model. More

//Chief Scout Harding is elevated to her rightful place in the main cast//

importantly, the creators are happy to share their work, posting screenshot reels of the slider placements needed to duplicate the effect. Ask nicely and they might even attempt to conjure a new face

for you. Like the idea of Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson tearing up the Storm Coast? Prepare to work that chin slider. Not all faces shine – we spot an unfortunate Tommy Lee Jones whose face appears to be melting into his own neck – and there's a nerdy fascination with *Game of Thrones* and *The Witcher*, but then what game isn't improved with some Ciri action? The community's greatest achievement is the perfect clone of Chief Scout Harding, the fan-favorite recon officer elevated to her rightful place among the *Inquisition's* big hitters. Just don't try to make her romance herself, okay? Some things are better left to fan fiction. ■

IF YOU DO ONE THING IN DRAGON AGE: INQUISITION THIS MONTH, MAKE IT... Grafting a C-lister's face onto the body of a hero.



XBOX EXTRA



Fallout: New Vegas

How two broken ankles gave us the fastest man on earth. Only in Fallout...

Dev Obsidian / Pub Bethesda / Reporter Matthew Castle

As the world and his dog slobber over footage of *Fallout 4's* one man and his dog, a tiny corner of the fanbase continues to whittle away at Bethesda's previous epics. *Fallout* is prime speedrunning territory due to an adaptive mission structure that lets you leapfrog entire stretches of the story by forcing your way into late-game locations. Follow the optimal path laid out in walkthroughs and it's possible for even a casual wastelander to storm *New Vegas'* Hoover Dam finale within two hours. Cool, until you learn the world record now stands at 24 minutes.

According to the record breaker, Ryderc33, the trick to his run is, ironically, breaking both legs. In *Fallout*, crippling a leg with a long fall permanently slows movement until it's healed with a Stimpak or by taking a nap, returning the missing speed. However, loading a save file created just before the crippling impact tricks the game into giving that same speed back before it

has even been lost. As a result you walk at 165% of your normal speed – the secret to shaving off the seconds that define a new world record.

Watching Ryderc33's journey is surreal, and not only because it begins with him hurling himself off a cliff. After the squish of compacted ankles comes the sprint, reducing a world designed to eat up hundreds of hours into a 20-minute path to victory. Just like that, everything you love about *New Vegas* – the hundreds of locations, brilliantly written dialogue and library of side quests – is revealed as nothing more than shiny baubles to distract from the brutal truth: this is a game about a man who talks to four people and turns on a computer. The illusion is shattered. It's down to *Fallout 4* to heal us. ■

//The trick to the run is, ironically, breaking both of your legs//

IF YOU DO ONE THING IN FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS THIS MONTH, MAKE IT... Going for gold. Or watching this guy do it: tinyurl.com/NWspeed

THE OXM
REPLAY

Revisiting the
resolutionally-
challenged

Red Dead isn't as
cover-reliant as most
post-*Gears* shooters,
thanks to the Dead
Eye mechanic.

Red Dead Redemption

Rockstar's Western is still its best game to date, believes Samuel Roberts



DETAILS

Dev Rockstar
San Diego

Pub Rockstar
Games

Released
May 2010

Scored 9/10

Red Dead Redemption was exactly what I wanted after *GTA IV*'s tighter, more concentrated setting and downbeat storyline. The sequel to Xbox's near-forgotten *Red Dead Revolver* restored the scale of San Andreas, and showed us what happens when Rockstar applies its extraordinary world-building ability to a period setting. I'm not convinced Rockstar's Wild West sandbox game has been surpassed in the intervening five years since release; *GTA V* has a bigger, much more impressive world, but *Red Dead* has everything else.

I think playing as a great character who isn't a complete jerk has a lot to do with that. *Red Dead* frames John Marston as a reformed outlaw in the last days of the Wild West, under the duress of the government to capture or kill Bill Williamson, one of his dangerous old cohorts. Marston's motivation is a simple dream of a civilized life and running a farm with his

family. This connection with him adds a valuable framework to the whole game, which is otherwise functionally *Grand Theft Auto* in the Wild West.

Red Dead radically overhauled *GTA IV*'s clunky third-person cover shooting. With the Dead Eye command, you can slow down time and line up shots, which Marston will then reel off in quick succession. Playing it now, I love how loud and raw Marston's old guns feel, particularly his revolvers.

The sprawling backdrop to all this rhythmic slaughter is the part of *Red Dead* I recall the most fondly, and I still adore the Wild West as it's portrayed here. Inevitably, I remember the world looking crisper than this, rather than its jagged edges and sometimes rough textures, particularly on NPCs. For what are essentially near-empty landscapes, each part of *Red Dead*'s world has its own color palette, architecture befitting its populace and memorable cliff formations.

The three acts take Marston from the more typical Western surroundings of New Austin, to Nuevo Paraíso in Mexico, before closing with West Elizabeth, a more civilized locale that underlines how Marston's era of outlaws is in its final days. Everyone on the internet

talked post-release about how Mexico is the boring part of the game. On one level, I agree. It distracts from the narrative thrust of Marston's revenge tale, putting him on both sides of a civil war, but there are still some decent set-pieces. Rockstar could've cut two hours here for a tighter second act.

There are a couple of annoying bits that feel like they wouldn't be in the game if it was made today. There's an awful lot of riding next to extremely slow NPCs, and the checkpointing isn't as generous as *GTA V*, either.

Those frustrations aside, there's such a strong variety of missions in the campaign, aided by the changes in scale, from huge conflicts to more intimate shoot-outs. The stranger side quests, returning from *GTA IV*, play out like episodes of a Western anthology. The best belongs to the 'Strange Man' – a gent in a top hat who knows more about Marston's past than he himself can recall. Marston's final encounter with him takes place at the exact spot that will, at the game's climax, become his grave. How stirring, for a videogame to show you a human embodiment of death, while being subtle enough to leave the Strange Man's true nature open to interpretation.


//How stirring, for a videogame
to show you a human
embodiment of death//



You really can't mess about when it comes to the dangerous, cute herbivores of the Mexican desert.



INFLUENCED BY...

RED DEAD REVOLVER 
Rockstar's first Western debuted Dead Eye mode.



INFLUENCE ON...

GRAND THEFT AUTO V 
Nabbed *Red Dead's* wildlife and random events.

It spotlights how unambitious game narratives have been in the time since its release. The writing and acting is generally great in *Red Dead* – Marston is a well-realized figure with a proper arc, and for the most part the supporting cast avoids the kind of mouthy caricatures you'd find in a *GTA* game. This lavish pastiche of a Western might not be on a par with *Unforgiven*, say, but it's at least comparable to a decent cable drama. The ending device, of having Marston betrayed and killed by the Bureau within gameplay, and then being replaced as the playable character by his vengeful son, demonstrates Rockstar's designers firing on all cylinders.

There's an astonishing relationship here between narrative and gameplay that hasn't been surpassed, even by Rockstar itself. *Red Dead* was just a special one-off. It feels complete in the way it depicts the Western genre in an interactive form, and remains Rockstar's most heartfelt game. ■



WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

Er... nothing, except its *Undead Nightmare* DLC. Still, Rockstar does take its time making sequels...



Publishers send OXM games. Loads of games. Good, bad and downright stinky. Every month, we delve into our Games Cupboard of Doom and replay a howler...

THIS MONTH... RIDE TO HELL: RETRIBUTION

Here's a fun lie for tricking your children into behaving. "Go to sleep now, Billy, or *Ride to Hell: Retribution* will break into your bedroom and install itself on your hard drive." Trauma guaranteed.

Xbox 360 graphics were tricky, so *Ride to Hell* sidestepped that issue by having visuals, glitches and pop-in that would embarrass the original Xbox. Early cutscenes, full of crooked animation and missing sound effects, have you witness your brother's murder. Cue an ineptly spun story of biker revenge and gang violence that's about as mature as being born.

Motorbike chases have all the sense of speed of a tortoise's retirement party, complete with overly simple QTEs to punch/crowbar/stab (all using the same

sound effect) other bikers off their hogs. Alone and panicking, their motorbike spontaneously explodes. We left *Ride to Hell: Retribution* alone for a few seconds in the hopes it would explode, too, but no dice. Pure sin is apparently immortal.

Fighting is monotonous, not helped by a broken combo system

that pushes your opponents out of punching distance. You can always shoot them

// We left the game alone, in the hopes it'd explode, but no dice //

instead, but this often has about the same impact as a punch. Downed bikers drop bags of drugs you can sell, but there aren't enough illegal substances in the world to warp our minds into believing that this doesn't deserve to be run over and over and over until all that remains are our painful memories of this linear, unfinished, broken failure of a game. Sweet dreams, Billy.



12 SIMULATION GAMES WE WANT ON XBOX ONE

Farming Simulator is the tip of the iceberg – PC gamers have been ‘enjoying’ games such as (no joke) Street Cleaning Simulator and Chemical Spillage Simulator for years. Since apparently there’s nothing too niche, mundane or perverted for the sim treatment, here’s what we want to see next...



01 Flight Attendant Simulator

We’ve had pilot sims, but now it’s time for the *real* work in the sky. Fetch drinks, serve ‘food’ and bust couples aiming to join the mile-high club, all against a backdrop of unpredictable turbulence.

02 Hurling Simulator

Let’s face facts: endless rehashes of sports games are getting boring. The popular Gaelic pursuit of hurling, though? A hazardous combo of sticks, balls and a *total* lack of padding. Far more exciting, plus it lends itself to an incredible subtitle: we’re going to make you hurl.

03 Bar Manager Simulator

Time to think about what goes on behind the scenes at your local bar as you work to keep drinks topped up, pretend to be interested in loyal customers’ casual racism and fight a losing battle to keep the carpet clean of puke. Profit scores docked for every stiff drink you consume.

04 Hospital Manager Simulation

None of this *Operation-style*

Surgeon Simulator nonsense – here you’re the *true* beating heart of a modern health service provider – the meddling middle-manager. Meet increasingly unreasonable budget demands by balancing the company books – do you invest in vital sterilized syringes, or reuse the existing stock and buy a new TV for the staff lounge? Tricky times.

05 Recycling Co-ordinator Simulator

No paper in with the cardboard! No plastics in with the glass! No clothing in the green bin! It’s like a big old game of *Twister*, except if you mess up in *Twister*, you don’t condemn the entire planet to a gradual watery grave.

06 Knitting Simulator

Master k2tog and cables, all without having to tangle yourself up in actual yarn. Features a heartbreaking finale where grandkids throw your creation in the trash on Christmas Day.

07 Avocado Ripeness Simulator

Test your nerve as you wait in real time for each avocado to



08 Cat-Herding Simulator

Herding cats is used as the benchmark for fiddly tasks – but how hard can it really be? Find out by progressing through difficulty levels Lazy Lap-Cat, Skittish Kitten and Ravenous Leopard. Launches with one feline facial expression: ‘looking at you like you’re a piece of dog dirt’. More looks as DLC, if and when the dev feels like it.

hit that infinitesimally tiny window between ‘rock hard’ and ‘totally inedible mush’. Will you press A too soon, or not soon enough? A sequel to the survival-horror thriller, *How Green Is Your Banana?*

09 Alfred Simulator

Polish the Batmobile, iron the Batsuit, ensure that Master Wayne gets all the Batvitamins a growing boy needs... we all know

who *really* wields the power in the Batcave, don’t we?

11 Nigerian Prince Simulator

In an unfortunate twist of fate, you need to get your cash out of Africa – and you’re willing to reward those who help you! Convince them to give up their bank details, while simultaneously minimizing both your credibility and police suspicion meters.



10 Goldfish Simulator

Ooh, this underwater environment looks great! I should explore! Ooh, this underwater environment looks great! I should explore! Ooh, this underwater environment looks great... Like *Halo*, it’s the same 30 seconds of fun, over and over.

12 Baby Simulator

Pros: sweet relief from the daily grind of adult life. Parents to cater to your every whim. Get to see the world with a new sense of wonder. Never having to wipe your own butt again. Cons: may have to sit in own excrement from time to time. Jagged bones about to push through gums.

NEXT ISSUE OF OXM ON SALE AUG 18 SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE MONEY: SEE PAGE 66 FOR DETAILS

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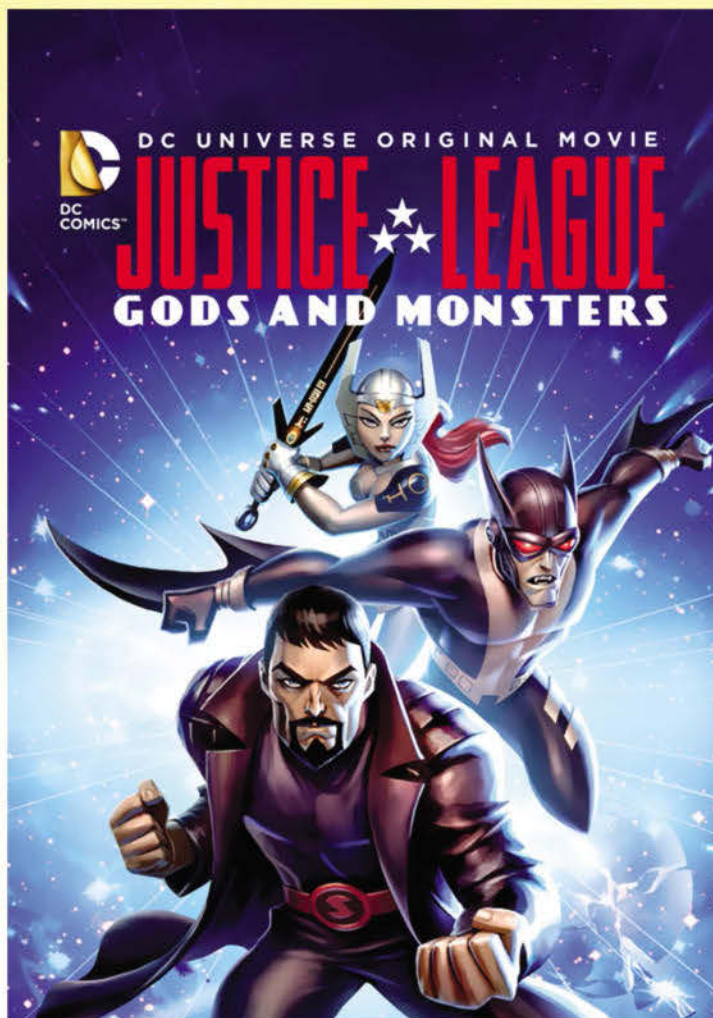


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